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## CAR SICKNESS IN PETS

*Dr. Rebecca Donaldson*

There are two common reasons that dogs get sick in the car: true motion sickness, or nausea due to anxiety from the car trip itself (traffic, noise, away from home, etc.)

It can be challenging to figure out which reason is causing your dog to vomit in the car. Does he or she only get sick once the car is moving? Did they seem calm prior to throwing up? If the answer is yes, they may be experiencing motion sickness.

If your dog immediately begins to shake, salivate, or show signs of fear when they get in the car, they are likely vomiting due to anxiety.

In either case, there are steps you can take to help make your dog feel better while they are in the car. To start, it helps to avoid feeding your dog at least 4 hours prior to getting in the car. A full stomach can trigger nausea in a dog who is already prone to vomiting in the car.

For vomiting due to motion sickness, it helps to take your dog on very short drives (like up and down the block) more frequently, and start to increase the distance over time. If your dog begins to salivate, having a second person in the back seat to help calm and distract them is very helpful. Some dogs get so nauseous that they require medications to prevent vomiting. Consult with your veterinarian to see which medication is best for your dog.

For vomiting due to anxiety, desensitization is key to preventing it in the future. Desensitization is the process by which you introduce the cause of their anxiety in small enough doses so that it does not trigger a stress response. In this case, it is the car that is causing anxiety. To start, have your dog approach the car with the engine off. If he or she does this calmly, reward them with praise. You can do this for a few days and then encourage them to get in the car. After your dog has been sitting in the car calmly for a few minutes a day, you can try turning the engine on for a few minutes, then eventually work up to driving around the block, and so on and so forth. The goal is to proceed very slowly so that your dog learns to associate the car with rewards and praise. If your dog has not responded well to desensitization, there are medications that your veterinarian can prescribe that can help calm your dog for longer car rides.

Remember to keep up with the training to prevent your dog from reverting back to their old behavior. If you need help or have any questions, please give us a call – we would be happy to help make you and your pet more comfortable together in the car! 