Helping your pet feel calm at the vet.

For many pets, a visit to the veterinary clinic can be stressful. Unfamiliar smells, other animals, car rides, and medical handling can all trigger fear or anxiety - even in pets who are calm and relaxed at home. Our goal is always to make veterinary care as fear-free, safe, and positive as possible. One tool that can help us do that is anxiolytic (anti-anxiety) medication, along with calming environmental supports.

Why anxiety matters

When pets are very anxious or fearful, it's not just emotionally upsetting - it can also:

- Make exams and procedures harder or unsafe
- Increase the risk of fear-based aggression
- Lead to inaccurate exam findings (stress can raise heart rate, blood pressure, and temperature)
- Create long-term fear of vet visits that worsens over time

Reducing anxiety helps your pet have a better experience, and it helps our team provide the best medical care.

Creating a calming environment at the clinic

In addition to gentle handling and treats, we use pheromone therapy in all our exam rooms:
Feliway® (cat rooms)

- Mimics natural feline facial pheromones that cats release when they feel safe
- Helps reduce fear, stress, and tension
- Can make cats feel more comfortable with handling and unfamiliar environments

Adaptil® (dog rooms)

- Mimics calming pheromones produced by mother dogs
- Helps dogs feel more secure and relaxed during stressful situations

These pheromones are odourless to humans and pets, and they help send a subtle signal of "this is a safe space."
Feliway and Adaptil can also be very helpful outside the clinic, especially when used consistently:

- Spray inside carriers, crates, or cars before travel
- Use diffusers at home for pets with ongoing anxiety
- Helpful for stressful events like vet visits, grooming, moving, or introducing new pets

Using pheromones at home together with medication and positive reinforcement can significantly improve your pet's comfort level.

What are pre-visit anti-anxiety medications?

These medications are given before a vet visit or stressful event to reduce fear, anxiety, and stress. They do not replace pheromones or fear-free handling, they work together to support your pet. Importantly, these medications are chosen to reduce anxiety, not simply to "sedate" your pet.

Common medications we may recommend

Trazodone

- What it does: Reduces anxiety and promotes calm behaviour
- Common uses:
    - Fearful or stressed dogs
    - Post-surgery confinement stress
    - Before anxiety inducing events – think vet visits, groomers, fireworks, car trips etc
- When it's used: Often given the night before and/or a few hours before a vet visit or stressful event
- What to expect: Pets usually remain awake and responsive, just calmer
- How it is given: oral tablet

Gabapentin

- What it does: Decreases anxiety and can also help with pain
- Common uses:
    - Very commonly used in cats
    - Helpful for handling sensitivity, fear, and pain-associated anxiety
    - Helpful for stressful events like vet visits, moving house, boarding or introducing new pets

- When it's used: Usually given the night before and again before a vet visit or stressful event
- Good to know: Mild sleepiness or wobbliness can occur and is expected
- How it is given: oral capsule that can be given as is, or opened and sprinkled on the food

Some pets benefit from both trazodone and gabapentin together, or in combination with other long term anxiety medications. We will always discuss options and tailor a plan specifically for your pet.

When might we recommend anti-anxiety medication?

- Your pet has shown fear, trembling, hiding, growling, or snapping at visits
- Past appointments have been extremely stressful
- Your pet needs painful, prolonged, or repeated procedures
- Nail trims, blood draws, or exams have become increasingly difficult
- Your pet struggles with confinement after surgery

Starting anxiety support early can help prevent fear from escalating over time.

Is it safe?

When prescribed appropriately, these medications are very safe. We carefully consider:

- Your pet's age, size, and medical history
- Other medications your pet is taking
- Past responses to anxiety support

Side effects are usually mild and temporary, and we're always happy to answer questions.

The bottom line

Recommending anti-anxiety medication or calming aids doesn't mean your pet is "bad" or "difficult." It means we're listening to your pet's emotional needs and responding with compassion.
A calmer visit means:

- Less fear for your pet
- Safer handling for everyone
- Better medical care
- More positive experiences in the future

If you ever have questions or concerns, please talk with us - we're here to help your pet feel as comfortable and confident as possible.

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