



Impact of Stress on Your Pet

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The veterinary ER is a busy place during the winter months. For all the joy and happiness that the holidays brought and the start of a new year, it can be a stressful time for both humans and animals alike. Parties, New Year's resolutions and the overall increase in activity and stress can present some challenges to the health of our pets.

Stress can have a large impact on the health of an animal. In the ER we commonly see many conditions where stress has played a role in the onset of illness. One of the more common, and potentially life threatening, conditions is Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC). Cystitis is inflammation of the urinary bladder. Its symptoms are bloody urine, inappropriate urination and excessive straining when urinating. Besides FIC, cystitis can also be caused by infection or bladder stones. There are many factors that likely cause FIC and stress is one of primary factors. Treatment is aimed at treating pain and eliminating stress. Any cat exhibiting symptoms of FIC should be seen as soon as possible because of its painful nature. It is particularly emergent in male cats, because FIC increases their susceptibility to urethral obstruction, which can be a life threatening condition.

Gastrointestinal disease is another frequently encountered illness in the ER in the winter. Although there are many causes of gastrointestinal disease, stress can be a primary cause in some situations. "Stress colitis" is frequently seen in animals that are boarded or exposed to a stressful situation. Animals with stress colitis will often have accidents in the house and will ask to go outside more frequently. Their stool is often very runny and blood or mucus may be present. They will occasionally vomit as well. Many of these animals will require medication to help relieve the symptoms.

Stress can exacerbate previously existing conditions as well. Many animals are able to compensate and tolerate symptoms of their chronic illnesses. When they are subjected to new stressors the delicate balance their body has created is disrupted and their symptoms can acutely worsen.

Prevention of stress in animals can be as difficult as it is in humans, but it can save pets from potentially serious illness. To limit stress on your pet, try to maintain the same routine. Avoid changes in diet or addition of new foods. Try to maintain a consistent feeding schedule and limit table scraps. Maintain a quiet space for your pet to go to get away from the crowd during parties. Set up a room with their bed and toys that can be closed off. Consider the use of pheromones, like Feliway for cats or DAP for dogs. Some animals may even benefit from medication if they are severely stressed. If you are considering boarding your pet, tour the facility first and discuss the use of anti-anxiety medications with your veterinarian prior to travel.

Limiting stress in pets will help everyone enjoy the New Year and will prevent the addition of a sick pet to an already stressful time. Have a safe, enjoyable 2018.



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