

## FEAR OF VET VISITS

Some dogs have issues with vet visits. So many visits are accompanied by invasive handling, restraint, and painful procedures. Anxiety can begin to brew even in the car (if the vet is the only place you drive to) or the parking lot. Counter-condition Fifi by starting to associate pleasurable things (food and toys in particular) with the vet outing. Start at the very beginning of the chain. If anxiety builds in the parking lot, go to the parking lot, play some ball, have some treats, do some training – then get back in the car and go home. You know that your counter-conditioning is working when you pull into the parking lot and she looks anticipatory rather than anxious. Now proceed a little farther in the process, perhaps going up to the vet office door or into the waiting room, playing/treating/training, then leave. Start to include the vet admin staff in the process, giving treats, throwing toys. Little by little, Fifi will have different emotions about the vet's office.

*Important Note:* If your pooch is an intractable patient, it's best to accompany this work with DSCC to the muzzle, so that vet procedures can be safely done, while Fifi is still comfortable and happy.

Also train a relaxation protocol that you can eventually employ when you are at the vet's office. - "**CHILL OUT**"/"**RELAX**": Touch can be very powerful. Indeed it can calm the wild beast, and it can also calm the wild beast in your pooch! We can use massage to help build a "chill out" command so that we can put relaxation on cue.

Pick a time of day when Fifi is naturally calm and will be most receptive to massage, likely in the evening, as the day winds down. Start with Fifi lying quietly on her side, with you sitting on the floor behind her. Use deep, slow, calming strokes. Rubbing her chest can be particularly effective, but experiment with massaging different parts of Fifi's body and notice which she seems to enjoy and luxuriate in most. Do a session at least once a day for about 10 minutes in length.

**Lavender** can help reduce stress and anxiety in dogs. Spray about 0.16 ounces of diffused lavender oil on the blanket or towel that you use for these chilling out sessions.

<http://www.spadogbotanicals.com/dog-sprays>

After a week, you should know whether your massage sessions are enjoyable to Fifi. If they are, then start associating them with the command "chill out" by saying the cue occasionally during the massage session.

As Fifi learns how to "chill out", start asking her to do it at different times of day, times that are gradually more challenging, when her energy level might be a little higher. See that she is able to achieve some calm even in more challenging environments.