

# SEPARATION ANXIETY IN DOGS



Separation anxiety is a fear response that occurs in dogs when they're separated from either a specific person or people, or in some cases, another animal. The dog is literally afraid of being left alone, just like some humans are afraid of public speaking or heights.

Noise sensitivity and phobias are medical conditions that can be managed by modifying the dog's behaviour and managing its environment. In severe cases it can be life threatening and require daily lifelong medication. This is similar to how diabetes can be treated with dietary changes and exercise but often requires medication to prevent the disease from being life threatening.

In mild cases the dog may feel uncomfortable on its own; it may not eat or play as much as usual. In moderate to more severe cases, the dog will express both physical and behavioural signs of severe stress.

## Behavioural signs of separation anxiety

Not only are the physical signs evidence that a dog is suffering, but in some cases the dog may cause damage to an owner's house and property, leading to nuisance and noise complaints and in severe cases, be even life threatening.



**Escaping.** Dogs try to escape by chewing through blinds, breaking through windows, scratching at doors and jumping over and digging under fences. Escaping can be dangerous for both the dog, if it gets hit by a car, and other people, if the dog shows aggression.

**Self-harming.** Occurs through chronic lick lesions from constant licking of paws or other body parts, broken nails or teeth from attempts to escape and penile injury from compulsive rubbing.

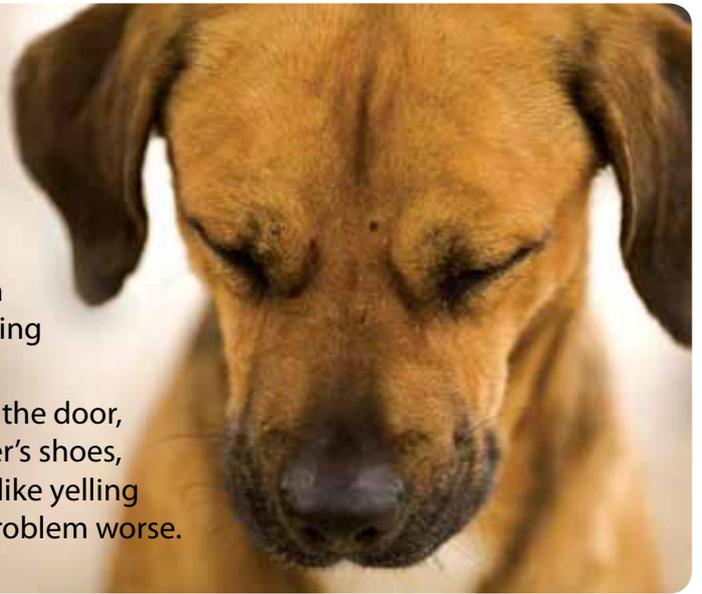
**Vocalising.** Dogs may howl, bark and whine.

**Damaging.** Dogs may cause damage to house and property and destroy furniture, shoes and other belongings.

## Punishment will make the condition worse

It's important for owners to know that when the animal's 'danger centre' is activated the animal isn't thinking about what it's doing, but responding to the threat. When a dog with separation anxiety is left alone they are panicking without thinking.

The dog isn't being naughty when it scratches the door, it isn't being vindictive when it chews an owner's shoes, it's responding to stress. Punishing in any way like yelling at it, hitting it or exiling it will only make the problem worse.



## Another dog will not necessarily fix the problem

The majority of dogs with separation anxiety experience the same fear response whether they're with other dogs or not. So introducing another dog at home won't prevent separation anxiety.



## Treatment

Separation anxiety is neither a training issue nor an obedience problem. Separation anxiety is a medical problem that requires a veterinarian to put together an appropriate treatment plan. This can involve a combination of medication, behavioural modification such as crate training and changing environmental factors. Separation anxiety is a serious disease which can cause great distress for both the pet and pet owner.

