



Me And My Dogs

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What I've Learned About Fear, Phobia and Anxiety in Dogs by Debbie Tringale

This series of articles is focused on fears, phobias and anxiety in dogs. It is important to know the difference between them to fully understand how to help your dog. Fear is an emotional response to a specific threatening event or situation. Phobia is an excessive fear response that persists despite harmless exposure to a specific threatening event or situation. Anxiety is the chronic state of apprehension of a real or imagined threatening event or situation. This series, What I've Learned About Fears, Phobias and Anxiety in Dogs, will discuss each of these behavior problems. It is for your information only. See your veterinarian for proper diagnosis and treatment.

Description

What I've Learned So Far About Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Dogs



Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is uncommon in dogs. This could be the case for two reasons; some in the veterinary profession do not believe it occurs (Dodman, 2008, p. 187), and it is often mistaken for separation anxiety (SA). I believe it is mistaken as SA so frequently, in this series it is discussed with anxiety although technically it is not. In Dr. Dodman's book, [The Well-Adjusted Dog](#) he tells the story of Emma the beagle he was treating for separation anxiety who was only showing a 30 percent improvement. He believed they could do better and suggested Emma may have ADHD instead. Dr. Dodman treated her and Emma became like a normal dog. Research on ADHD in dogs is limited, however, studies have demonstrated that the disorder in dogs is so similar to the disorder in children that the extensive knowledge of ADHD in children can be applied to dogs. The attached ADHD questionnaire was adapted from a human questionnaire and is demonstrated to be reliable and valid in assessing the disorder in dogs (Vas et al., 2007).

Only your Veterinarian or Veterinary Behaviorist can diagnose and treat ADHD in your dog.
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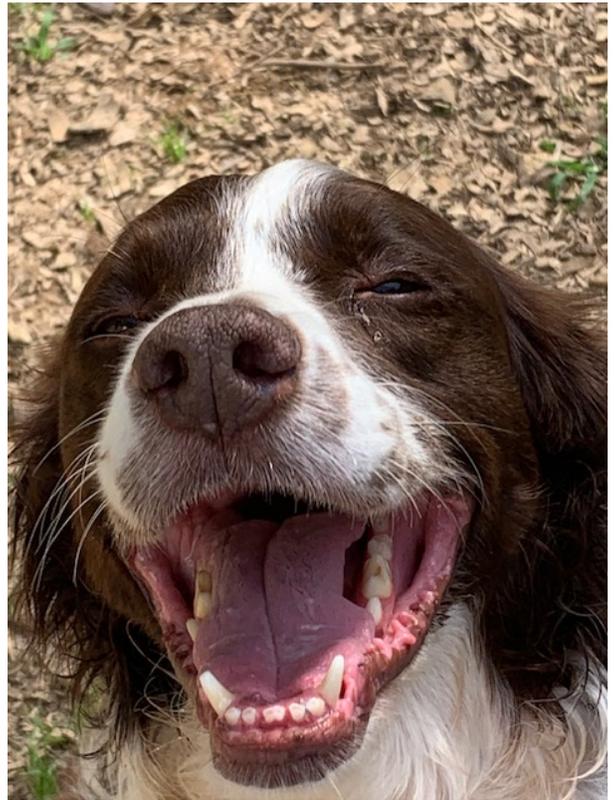
Symptoms

In humans, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder. The symptoms of ADHD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. In animals, this description is modified to include loss of attention to stimuli over a period of time; hyperactivity in a familiar environment; and impulsiveness that gradually gets worse (Lit et al., 2010). It is my belief that ADHD is mistaken for separation anxiety (SA) because these dogs can also vocalize, pant, pace, be destructive, and sometimes be aggressive. These additional behaviors are caused by their hyperactivity and impulsivity; and that's why it looks like SA. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a *cognitive development disorder* (Sagvolden, 2011). Hyperactivity and impulsivity make it difficult for ADHD dogs to learn new good behaviors and unlearn bad behaviors (Russell et al., 2005). In my view, hyperactivity in a familiar environment, and the inability to learn and unlearn are critical to determine if your dog has ADHD and to measure their progress toward normalcy.

Case Study

Holly the Brittany Spaniel

Holly was a three-year-old Brittany Spaniel that was sent to me because it was believed she had separation anxiety (SA). Holly was destructive, she would pant, pace and vocalize when left alone. She showed no improvement to training or prescription medication in her foster home. When Holly arrived, intensive training began to relieve her of her SA. Holly had no relief, her behavior got worse, her destructive tendencies were so severe they resulted in self-harm. Soon it was clear Holly did not have SA, it had to be something else. In my favorite book, [The Well-Adjusted Dog](#) by Dr. Nicholas H. Dodman, I read the passage about Emma the Beagle. I did a deep dive into the literature on ADHD in dogs. The symptom of hyperactivity in a familiar environment reminded me of a video I saw of Holly pacing and panting, unable to relax in her foster home with her family present. Holly did not have SA; she had ADHD.



Behavior Modification

Holly's new behavior modification plan (BMP) was focused on teaching her the skills to self-manage her ADHD. I was unable to find a veterinary professional that would consider the possibility Holly had ADHD, so her BMP began without a formal diagnosis. In studies, a low protein diet plus the supplement tryptophan have shown positive results in relieving ADHD (DeNapoli et al., 2000). I was already feeding her low protein food (22%) and I gave her [NutriCalm](#), a supplement containing tryptophan. To alleviate some of her hyperactivity: I fed Holly with a [Bob-A-Lot](#); gave her [Nylabones](#) and stuffed [Kongs](#); I extended her walks and gave her extra time outside. Soon her behavior improved and she was ready to learn new behaviors to self-manage her ADHD. Holly was already crate trained so I taught her to get her bone and go in her crate. I repeated this exercise until she would do it on command. Then when she was slightly aroused, I encouraged her to get her bone and go in her crate. In time, Holly performed this behavior on her own. Her only cue was a low level of arousal.

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Outcome

After several months Holly was ready for adoption. It took a while to find an appropriate placement. A young family with an ADHD child was the perfect fit. They have knowledge and experience with ADHD with their child and apply it to Holly. To check on her, I emailed her new family the video of Holly pacing and panting, unable to relax in her previous foster home. They were surprised to see her behavior. They said she was much calmer and more relaxed than in the video, a good sign she was feeling better. Later, Holly's family shared an incidence when children, adults and a dog visited their home. It was a bit too much for Holly so she got her bone and went in her crate. Clearly, she learned and retained this skill, another sign she was on the path to normalcy. Holly has since been weaned off the tryptophan supplement, but her family can always go back to giving it to her if necessary. With the help of her new family, Holly appears to have her ADHD under control and is living her best life.

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Debbie Tringale, owner of Me And My Dogs, specializes in dogs with fear, phobia and anxiety. She has been training special needs dogs since 2007 and has helped over a hundred rescue dogs previously considered unadoptable find loving homes.

As a trainer and educator, Debbie creates behavior modification plans designed for the individual needs of the dog owner and their dog. She has an MBA and has completed all but dissertation toward a Ph.D. in Psychology with an emphasis in Cognition and Instruction.

Debbie lives in the woods in Northwest Georgia where she enjoys hiking with her Golden Retrievers and Great Pyrenees.

ADHD Dog Owner Questionnaire

Item	Never	Some-times	Often	Very Often
1. My dog has a difficult time learning because they are careless or other things can easily attract their attention.				
2. It is easy to attract my dog's attention, but they lose interest quickly.				
3. It's difficult for my dog to concentrate on a task or play.				
4. My dog has difficulty maintaining a stay.				
5. My dog cannot be quiet or easily calmed.				
6. My dog fidgets all the time.				
7. It seems that my dog doesn't listen even if they know someone is speaking to them.				
8. Given the chance, my dog would always play and run.				
9. My dog solves simple tasks easily, but often has difficulties with complicated tasks, even when they know how and has practiced it often.				
10. My dog reacts hastily and that's why they fail tasks.				
11. My dog's attention can be easily distracted.				
12. My dog cannot wait as it has no self-control.				

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