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SITS & WIGGLES

The Newsletter of the Animal Clinic of Chardon

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Dog Day of Summer 2024



SOLVING THE MYSTERY: HOW PHEROMONES WORK TO CALM PETS

Pheromones play a significant role in the social behavior of many species, including dogs, cats, and possibly humans. Although our pets cannot consciously control pheromone secretion, the chemicals can influence how they feel in certain situations and with whom they form social bonds. Dogs and cats rely heavily on pheromone communication, using their refined sense of smell and a specialized nasal organ to detect pheromone messages.

Scientists have studied several pheromone types in pets, which has led to the creation of synthetic versions designed to promote calm, relaxed behavior. These pheromones are now widely available and, because they don't cause harmful side effects, they are an essential tool for Fear Free Certified® Veterinary Professionals and pet owners to reduce fear, anxiety, and stress in pets at home and beyond.

Understanding pheromones in dogs and cats

Animals use pheromones, which are chemicals secreted from oil glands and detected through the vomeronasal organ in the nasal cavity, to communicate with others of their species. These molecules can trigger specific brain responses and influence various behaviors, including mating, marking, and social bonding. (Continued on next page)



SOLVING THE MYSTERY: HOW PHEROMONES WORK TO CALM PETS (CONTINUED)

Dogs and cats produce several pheromone types for varied purposes, including:

- **Maternal pheromones** — Emitted by lactating females to soothe nursing puppies and kittens
- **Appeasement pheromones** — Used to signal a non-threatening, friendly gesture
- **Sex pheromones** — Influence reproductive behavior and mate choice
- **Fear and stress hormones** — Impact how dogs and cats respond when they come in contact with fear pheromones left by another dog or cat



How synthetic pheromones work to calm pets

Synthetic pheromones are lab-created versions of well-studied pheromone chemical compounds. Currently, synthetic pheromone manufacturers are most interested in maternal and appeasing pheromones, which are thought to create a sense of calm during stressful events and can enhance bond formation or reduce stressful pet interactions.

The synthetic versions of these chemicals most often include analogs of dog appeasing pheromone, cat maternal pheromone, and cat facial pheromone, which is released when your cat rubs their cheeks on surfaces around the home. These bind to receptors in the nose and brain, which triggers neural pathways that induce feelings of calm, familiarity, and belonging. Synthetic pheromones, which are available in various forms, including room diffusers, sprays, and wearable collars, are unlikely to cause adverse reactions, and are generally considered safe.

Pheromones can effectively reduce stress and anxiety in dogs and cats experiencing separation anxiety or noise phobias, during veterinary visits, or even while introducing new household pets. While synthetic pheromones are a valuable tool in our anti-anxiety toolbox, they are best used in conjunction with other methods as part of an overall behavioral treatment plan.



Pheromones for pets at home

Providing your pet with pheromones at home may help smooth out stressful transitions, such as moving to a new home or acquiring a new pet, help reduce inter-pet conflict, and reduce anxiety, which often contributes to problem behaviors such as house soiling or excessive scratching. The goal of pheromone use is to create a sense of ease and promote a Fear Free home environment.

For maximum effect, provide steady pheromone exposure with wearable collars or room diffusers. Consult your Fear Free Certified Veterinarian or a qualified animal behavior professional to learn which products may work best for your pet and how to combine pheromones with behavior modification techniques.

Pheromones for veterinary visits

Using synthetic pheromones in Fear Free Certified Veterinary Practices helps create a welcoming atmosphere, and diffusers or sprays used in waiting areas, exam rooms, or on veterinary team members can help pets relax. This technique helps prevent negative veterinary experiences, which can create lasting fears that prevent pets from receiving necessary veterinary care. Pet owners can also use pheromones in carriers or spray them on a pet's collar or bandana to reduce travel stress. Although pheromone products are safe, they are not designed to be sprayed directly on a pet.

Used alone, pheromone products can provide everyday behavior support. For anxious or stressed pets or those with difficult behaviors, pheromones are best combined with other therapies. Anxiety wraps, species-specific music, supplements, medications, and Fear Free handling methods can complement pheromones to reduce fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS) and improve your pet's wellbeing.

HELPING YOUR NEWLY ADOPTED PET ADJUST

Be Patient

All newly adopted animals will need time to decompress and fully transition between shelter life and their new home. This decompression period will vary from a few weeks to several months, as each pet is an individual and their learning histories and previous home situations vary widely. Expect a certain amount of shyness at first, as they ease into your home.

Offer LOTS of treats

You can quickly build trust with your new pet by offering treats for any behavior that you'd like to see more of (such as approaching you, making eye contact, sitting, being quiet, or lying down). Initially, use high-value, meat-based treats, such as cooked chicken, that are highly palatable and easy on the tummy. You can also use their regular food as treats.

Create a Predictable Schedule

Give your new pet a consistent routine. Feed them in the same place and at the same time every day. Add in enrichment activities at set times each day. Take them for walks at the same time, and take the same route initially. Do not forget to include frequent nap time!

Allow the Pet to Hide

It may seem counterintuitive, but if your newly adopted pet wants to just hunker down and hide for a while, let them! Never force them to interact with a family member or another pet. You can try gently coaxing them out by tossing treats out and then leaving the area, but if they prefer not to come out, let them be. Forcing them out of a hiding spot will only make them more afraid and teach them that they no longer have a safe space.

Ease into Introductions

Introduce only one new person or animal at a time and use LOTS of positive rewards such as food treats, toys, play, and praise for all introductions. Avoid having visitors for a few weeks at least, as the new pet settles in. Be extra cautious with children and do not allow kids to play roughly with the pet. The first thing many kids want to do is hug their new family member, but as a general rule, most pets do not enjoy hugs. Kids should be gradually introduced, and every interaction with the pet should be closely supervised.

Create a Safe Space

Build a "Fear Free Fortress" using a small room, a gated off area, or an exercise pen that's just for the new pet. It should have toys they enjoy, something safe to chew on, water, and comfy bedding. Play calming music (such as classical or soft piano music), plug in a diffuser of calming dog or cat pheromones, and make it easy for them to retreat into this safe space often.

DOG DAY OF SUMMER



Save the Date! Join us for the Dog Day of Summer. Vendors, contests, and fun for you and your dog!

When: Saturday, July 13th from 2 - 5 pm
Where: Chardon Square/Gazebo

***"A dog desires affection more than its dinner. Well - almost."
-Charlotte Gray***

ACOC Birthdays

Dr. Jessica - 6/4

Kaylee- 6/25

Nicole- 6/25

