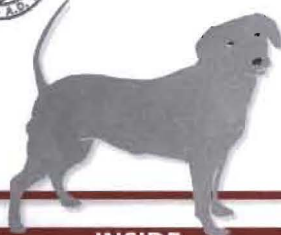




Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine



DOG Watch

Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine

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INSIDE

Targeting 'Fake' Service Dogs 2
Guide Dog Users Inc. steps up its efforts to raise awareness about them.

Two Major Health Studies Begin 2
Funding goes to support research on epilepsy and hypothyroidism.

Those Dead Skin Cells: Dandruff! 3
Commonly known as seborrhea, the condition can be inherited or acquired.

Daisy Avoids Her New Owner 8
She'll play with two other Maltese in the house, then go off by herself.

IN THE NEWS ...

A Contagious Dog Flu Continues Its Slow Spread

While dogs' susceptibility to Ebola remains the subject of debate, provable health risks exist when dogs are in close contact, as in kennels, shelters and day care. One example: canine influenza. The American Veterinary Medical Association includes the virus on its most recent list of common communicable canine diseases.

The Animal Health Diagnostic Center at Cornell first identified the virus in 2004 in conjunction with a University of Florida study on respiratory disease in racing Greyhounds. It was later found to be related to an equine virus and continues to move slowly through the canine population.

Infection is spread through respiratory secretions and contaminated objects — clothes, bowls, leashes. The virus can survive 48 hours on surfaces and 12 hours on human hands, although humans can't contract it. Dogs can be ill and not show signs, such as coughing, fever and stuffy nose. Fatalities usually result from pneumonia. A vaccine is available but not recommended for every dog. ♦

Debunking the Dominance Theory

It's based on bad science, often about wolves, and can be counterproductive and dangerous used in training

The use of dominance in dog training — or rather a misinterpretation of it — has given rise to some silly advice: "Pretend to eat from your dog's bowl before allowing him to eat," or, "Never let your dog be in a position that's higher than you in a room."

If you don't observe these rules, the theory goes, your dog will think he's dominant over you and never obey you. These examples are harmless, but trainers who look to dominance theory to justify using force may be putting owners at risk, says behaviorist



BIGSTOCK

A team of researchers, including three from Cornell, last year discovered that dogs and wolves descended from a common ancestor.

Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., emeritus professor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

No Alpha Rolls. "If you turn a dog over on his back in the so-called 'alpha roll' in the name of dominating him, it's the most dangerous thing you can do, second only to hitting your dog," says Dr. Houpt. The move intensifies aggression.

Recent studies have shown canine dominance theory is based on bad science, including

(continued on page 4)

Anesthesia Presents Fewer Risks Today

Improved drugs, precise monitoring and an increase in the number of specialists all contribute to greater safety

If your dog needs to have anesthesia, you can rest easier about the procedure because it poses fewer risks today, thanks to newer drugs, precise monitoring and an increased number of board-specialized veterinarians.

"Our discipline has evolved," says Luis Campoy, LV CertVA, MRCVS, Section Chief of Anesthesiology and Analgesia at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Mortality figures bear this out, showing a significant decrease in recent decades. "In the 1990s, the overall mortality rate for dogs undergoing anesthesia was .23 percent," says Dr. Campoy. "That had dropped to

.17 percent by 2008 — and for healthy dogs, as opposed to dogs with pre-existing conditions, that rate was only .05 percent."

Mortality Rates. Half as many dogs as cats die during anesthesia, says Dr. Campoy, a diplomate of the European College of Veterinary Anaesthesia and Analgesia, "however, the mortality rate for humans is only .02 to .05 percent, so we know there's still a lot of room for improvement in the veterinary arena."

Some of the greatest progress has occurred simply in the way anesthesia is practiced, he says. "We are better at identifying

(continued on bottom of page 6)

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SHORT TAKES

Targeting the Fraudulent Use of Service Dog Designations

Guide Dog Users Inc. has stepped up its campaign to raise awareness about the misrepresentation of pets as service animals. Continuing news reports have made it difficult for people with trained service animals to access public places, the organization says.

"It makes it hard for all of us who depend on our legitimate service animals for independent travel when business owners question our right to visit their establishments in the company of our guide dogs or when untrained or uncontrolled pets masquerading as service animals distract our dogs, or make it unsafe for us or our dogs to share the same space," says Penny Reeder of Montgomery Village, Md., president of Guide Dog Users, Inc. (GDUI).

Many people with "emotional support animals" mistakenly believe they have the right to be accompanied by their dogs in public areas, GDUI says. Emotional support dogs are said to provide comfort and support to individuals with emotional conditions.

GDUI has urged members to share information with businesses about their civil right protections from the U.S. Department of Justice, Reeder says. "In addition, we are encouraging our members who live in states that do not have laws that address this issue on their books to advocate with their lawmakers at the local and state levels to pass such legislation."

Sixteen states now have criminal or civil laws prohibiting misrepresentation of a pet as a service animal.

Two Major Health Studies

The AKC Canine Health Foundation (CHF) has funded studies on what it describes as two major health concerns: epilepsy and hypothyroidism.

Sam Nicholas Long, Ph.D., at the University of Melbourne will receive \$116,000 and Ned Patterson, DVM, Ph.D., at the University of Minnesota, \$104,781. Their goals are a greater understanding of epilepsy, the underlying mechanisms

that predispose dogs to the disease and new drugs to combat it. Drugs today don't provide relief for nearly one-third of affected dogs.

Diagnosing hypothyroidism is one of the greatest challenges in veterinary medicine, the CHF says. It has awarded Jan A. Mol, Ph.D., at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands \$48,195 to investigate methods that may provide a more accurate diagnosis. Improved diagnostic tools could lead to early intervention to prevent the progression of damage to the thyroid.

Both diseases impact dogs and humans, the CHF says, citing National Institute of Health estimates that, in the U.S., epilepsy affects 2 million people, and hypothyroidism affects nearly 5 percent of people.



Rah, Rah, Woof!

Dogs live with owners in a pet-friendly dormitory at the University of Northern Colorado. There have been no complaints from residents so far, not even about barking.

The University of Northern Colorado in Greeley has designated two floors of a dormitory as pet friendly. Dogs and cats may live with owners on the suite-style second-to-fourth floors of Lawrenson Hall if the animals are spayed or neutered and weigh 40 pounds or less. Certain breeds and their mixes are prohibited.

Owners must attend orientation for the pilot program, buy liability insurance, keep their pets on leashes and obtain roommates' approval. Several universities around the country permit pets to live with students, with fish predominating. Among the small pets that Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Fla., allows are non-venomous snakes. They have to be less than four feet long. ❖

Those Dead Skin Cells: Dandruff!

Commonly known as seborrhea, the condition can be inherited or acquired from several sources

We don't usually think of the skin as being one of the body's organs, but it is — the largest, in fact. The skin has another significant and unique characteristic: It replaces itself frequently.

Cube-shaped basal cells line the deepest layer of the epidermis, the outermost layer of the skin. As the basal cells divide, they produce new cells that are pushed upward toward the surface. As these cells mature, they form lipids and keratin, which are fibrous proteins, and they cause the skin to be tough and waterproof.

However, moving on up isn't a metaphor for success of these skin cells but their death. As they move upward, the cells start to die. "All the cells on the skin's surface are dead cells that are sloughed off into the environment," says dermatologist William H. Miller, Jr., VMD, Medical Director of the Cornell University Companion Animal Hospital.

Shredding Dander. The dead skin cells are known as dander. Because they are shed in tiny packets, they are usually invisible to the human eye. We typically don't think about dander — except as it affects our allergies — but changes in skin production can bring it to our attention. If your dog has dry, scaly skin, or if he has crusty or greasy skin and hair, they can signal the presence of what are called keratinization disorders, exfoliative dermatoses or, more commonly, seborrhea.

"Anything that increases the number of cells produced; changes the lipid, or fat, content of the skin; dries the skin, such as low humidity; or changes the size of the packets that are shed will produce visible dandruff or scaling," Dr. Miller says.

Seborrhea can be acquired, meaning it's caused by outside influences. When seborrhea is genetically influenced, it's called primary seborrhea. One of the most common inherited forms is ichthyosis.

Ichthyosis, which comes from the Greek word "*ichthys*," meaning fish, is a rare condition that results in roughened skin covered in thick, greasy scales. Breeds prone to the disorder include:

- ◆ American Bulldogs
- ◆ Cavalier King Charles Spaniels
- ◆ Golden Retrievers
- ◆ Jack Russell Terriers
- ◆ West Highland White Terriers

The dogs are born with abnormal skin, which worsens as they mature. The disease is diagnosed with a skin biopsy. Ichthyosis isn't curable and can predispose to severe infections and other skin changes, but in some cases can



DR. WILLIAM H. MILLER, CORNELL

Considerable scaly skin — dandruff — is evident on this Doberman's skin as a result of seborrhea, also known as exfoliative dermatoses.

be managed with frequent baths using anti-seborrheic shampoos and moisturizing conditioners. Sometimes, treatment with synthetic retinoids, vitamin-A based topical creams, can help.

Dogs with primary seborrhea have scaly, crusty, waxy or greasy skin or haircoat, and an odor. The condition may also be accompanied by a waxy type of otitis externa, or inflammation of the outer ear.

Primary seborrhea occurs when there are defects in the complicated process of producing the skin cells that manufacture keratin. The cells reproduce more rapidly than normal, causing flaky skin and sebum (skin oil) to form at an excessive rate. Primary seborrhea can appear as a greasy form (seborrhea oleosa), a dry form (seborrhea sicca) or a combination of both.

Skin Biopsy. A case of primary seborrhea, diagnosed with a skin biopsy, is usually apparent by the time a dog is 1 year old. Dogs with the condition may also be more prone to itchy secondary bacterial or yeast infections.

There's no cure, but like ichthyosis, primary seborrhea can be managed with
(continued on bottom of page 7)

ABOUT THAT DOGGY ODOR ...

Three salient facts about canine skin:

1. The epidermis varies in its depth over the body. It's thick and tough on the nose and paw pads, but thin and delicate at the groin.
2. An oily substance called sebum, which coats each strand of hair, causes the "doggy odor" that so often accompanies breeds with water-resistant coats.
3. Skin color ranges from pink to light brown and is sometimes dark with patches of black.

DOMINANCE... *(continued from cover)*

an unsubstantiated assumption about human-dog interaction. These findings, which often run counter to popular wisdom, support training methods that can help enhance our relationship with our dogs:

◆ *Dogs are not wolves.* According to an analysis of modern dog and wolf genomes published last year by an international team of researchers — including Ilan Gronau, Ph.D., Adam Boyko, Ph.D., and Adam Siepel, Ph.D., at Cornell — dogs and wolves evolved from a common ancestor. The wolf-like animal is believed to have existed 9,000 to 34,000 years ago. As animal behaviorist Ian Dunbar, BVetMed, MRCVS, Ph.D., known for his influence on dog-friendly training, puts it, “Learning from wolves to interact with pet dogs

makes about as much sense as saying, ‘I want to improve my parenting — let’s see how the chimps do it!’”

Observations of dogs left to their own devices confirm the genetic evidence. Feral dogs sometimes roam together in packs, but they generally don’t help to feed each other as wolves do. They also mate at will, rather than forming a breeding pair as wolves do.



BIGSTOCK

Pack of three? Misinterpretation of wolf behavior led to describing households of dogs and humans as packs, but it’s not known if dogs consider us part of their cohort.

WOLVES AREN'T ‘ALPHAS’ — THEY’RE MOSTLY JUST PARENTS

There is no question that animals — including humans — observe hierarchies in their social organizations. The term “pecking order,” often used in the context of office politics, entered the language after a 1921 study by Norwegian zoologist Thorleif Schjelderup-Ebbe observed how hens used their beaks to dominate other hens to get first dibs on food. Once the hierarchy was established, the study found, there was no need for constant squabbling.

Subsequent studies of other species, including chimpanzees, lions, meerkats (members of the mongoose family), cattle and goats, revealed a variety of social structures to determine who gets first access to resources such as food and breeding privileges, as well as ways of enforcing these structures, especially aggression.

Ironically, wolves, the species from which dog behavior — and dog training theory — was erroneously extrapolated, organize themselves in ways less regularly confrontational than those of many other species.

Wildlife research biologist L. David Mech, Ph.D., takes some responsibility for the dissemination of misinformation about the wolf’s nature. “The concept of the alpha wolf is well ingrained in the popular wolf literature at least partly because of my book ‘The Wolf: Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species’ ... published in 1970,” Dr. Mech writes on his website. “Alpha implies competing with others and becoming top dog by winning a contest or battle.”

His subsequent research, however, revealed that “Most wolves who lead packs achieved their position simply by mating and producing pups, which then became their pack. In other words they are merely breeders, or parents.”

◆ *We’re likely not part of their pack.*

The false wolf-dog analogy and misinterpretation of wolf behavior in the wild have led to describing households of dogs and humans as packs. We’re keepers of desirable resources, but scientists haven’t determined whether dogs consider us part of their cohort.

◆ *Dominance training theories were based on inaccurate wolf studies.* The wolves scientists observed behaving aggressively toward each other were studied in captivity; they were also from different families. A typical wolf pack in the wild is a cohesive family that bands together to get food and raise offspring. The so-called “alpha pair” are parents, not the winners of a lupine version of the “Hunger Games.” (See sidebar at the left.)

◆ *A dominant or alpha dog doesn’t exist.* Dogs display dominant behavior toward each other, but it’s a relationship between two individual dogs. Although a strict hierarchy applies in some other species, that’s not the case with canines. A dog dominant in relation to a dog in one household might be submissive with a dog in another home. Even within a single household, dominance roles shift; a dog dominant in one situation with another dog might not be dominant in another situation, one in which the resource — say, a particular toy — is not as valuable. To say “I have an alpha dog” is meaningless. ◆

WHY FORCE DOESN'T WORK IN TRAINING: FOR ONE THING, THEY HAVE FASTER REFLEXES

The systematic use of force in dog training has a long history but is mostly associated with military and police forces — and with protective training gear — rather than with pet dogs.

That changed in the mid-1970s with the Monks of New Skete, who based their book "How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend" on the misinterpretation of wolf behavior. The monks recommended physical discipline, including shaking dogs by the scruff of their neck while yelling in their faces and, in the case of severe disobedience, the "alpha wolf rollover."

More recently, dominance theory-based training and the alpha roll were resurrected by Cesar Millan on his National Geographic "Dog Whisperer" TV show. "Millan is a very charismatic guy who feels every behavior problem, even separation anxiety, is caused by the struggle for dominance between dogs and people," says behaviorist Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., emeritus professor at Cornell.

"In fact, dominance has very little to do with training. Most unruly behaviors in dogs occur not out of the desire to gain higher rank but simply because undesirable behaviors have been rewarded."

As the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior's "Position Statement on the Use of Dominance Theory in Behavior Modification of Animals" explains it, "Pinning a dog down when he is scared will not address the root of his fear. Furthermore, it can heighten the aggression." The reason: Most aggression in dogs is caused by fear.

One popular misconception holds that positive training requires owners to spoil their dogs, Dr. Houpt says. "You can give a treat as motivation, and then after you've trained the dog to expect the treat, you give the treat every third or fourth time and that gives the dog reason to come back. It's like a slot machine, a variable reward system." Eventually, treats can be phased out.

"The best training tool is ignoring behaviors you don't like, and unless it's life threatening, not to respond to them," Dr. Houpt says. When a puppy jumps up on you, for example, he's seeking attention. If you ignore him, the puppy learns jumping has no benefits.

Perhaps the best reason to eschew force is that it undermines our relationship with our pets. The late Sophia Yin, DVM, MS, a pioneer in positive training, used videos about dogs' body language to educate owners about dogs' state of mind, from sad to neutral



Treats can be a motivator in training, gradually given every third or fourth time as a reward and eventually phased out. "It's like a slot machine, a variable reward system," says behaviorist Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., emeritus professor at Cornell.

to happy. She once said that, "My clients think that they have to use force to [train] a dog who's well-behaved because that's what they see on TV. They aren't checking to see if their dogs are actually happy."

Aside from ethical and moral reasons to avoid using force in dog training, there are also practical ones:

- ◆ **It's too generalized.** The notion that "You just need to be the boss" doesn't provide the reason for what the owner considers the dog's misbehavior. Nor does it explain how the owner has reinforced the behavior.
- ◆ **It doesn't allow for mistakes.** "If you punish your dog at the wrong time, you've punished the wrong behavior. If you hit your dog after 20 attempts to get him to come, you've taught him not to come or else he'll get hit. If you give your dog food after 20 attempts, the dog will figure he will get food," Dr. Houpt says.
- ◆ **Humans are not as adept using force as dogs.** We're slower than almost all dogs, and we don't have the strength of larger dogs. Dogs have better timing and better reflexes. We domesticated them because of our brainpower, not our brawn.

We can use our brains today to get dogs to do our bidding. "If an animal wants food, we can put it away so they can't get it," Dr. Yin has said. "We can withhold petting until they act more appropriately. If they want to rush out the door, we don't have to open it."

ANESTHESIA... *(continued from the cover)*

which dogs may pose a greater challenge and what factors may pose a risk for general anesthesia. These include extremes of age and weight, the urgency and duration of the procedure, and the complexity of the surgery. Obviously, a six-hour procedure such as a very involved tumor removal will entail more labor-intensive anesthesia and involve a greater risk than a 20-minute spaying procedure."

At the same time, Dr. Campoy says, "Veterinarians generally are becoming more proficient at recognizing when they are not equipped to deal with anesthetizing a particular dog and are more likely to ask for advice or to refer that patient to a specialist. There have also been improvements in the drugs themselves. Drugs that are used nowadays have better margin of safety and a more refined pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic [movement through and out of the body] profile.

Specialized Training. There is also a greater presence of board-certified anesthesia specialists in private practice, in addition to referral clinics and university hospitals. Upon graduation from veterinary school, they will have spent at least one year in a rotating internship and three years in a residency



Today's better-informed owners ask why some procedures in human medicine can't be done on their pets, helping to drive anesthesiology forward, says Dr. Luis Campoy, LV CertVA, MRCVS, administering anesthesia at Cornell.

before passing a rigorous exam and receiving their board certification.

But their education doesn't end there, Dr. Campoy says. "We attend annual worldwide meetings of veterinary anesthesiologists, sharing knowledge and experience, and publishing research specific to veterinary anesthesiology and analgesia. We are also getting better at talking to dog owners about the risks associated with anesthesia."

A HIGH-TECH APPLICATION OF LOCAL ANESTHESIA

A special use of local anesthesia is one of the advanced techniques in anesthesiology offered at the Cornell University Hospital for Animals. The procedure is done on a daily basis for anesthesia and for pain management for patients undergoing palliative therapy, Dr. Campoy says.

"We basically find the nerves that serve a particular part of the body and inject local anesthetic around those nerves. The end result is that we can selectively numb the part of the body to be operated on and provide necessary and desired analgesia. We commonly use a combination of ultrasound guidance and electrolocation [changes in the electric field] with great levels of accuracy."

Numbing one part of the body — such as a fractured leg — allows us to reduce the necessary depth of anesthesia making it safer, Dr. Campoy says. "It provides the greatest level of analgesia possible, and facilitates a faster return to normal behavior, a faster recovery and a better outcome all around."

The ideal candidates are dogs without "co-morbidities," Dr. Campoy says. "If there is a history of concurrent disease such as renal disease, heart problems or respiratory disease, the risk of mortality increases. Emergency procedures present an even greater risk. There may be less time to take a detailed history or explore options. "For example, if a patient presents with profuse, life-threatening bleeding, you need to go into life-saving mode and act quickly," he says.

Medical History. For less urgent situations, the time spent taking a thorough medical history can be well spent. "I can't stress its importance enough," Dr. Campoy says. "An observant owner who reports the full details of their dog's condition can provide valuable clues about their pet's health that in turn may impact our anesthetic plan.

"For example, if we know that a dog has been having difficulty eating or showing signs of pain when opening his mouth, then we will have a much better idea of how to prepare for and manage a potentially difficult airway when putting this dog under general anesthesia. Report all changes to your dog's veterinarian or specialist — anything from a simple cough to more serious symptoms. Something you think might be trivial might end up being important."

In deciding on a specific anesthesia, there is a common misconception that many drugs are available. "In actuality, there aren't that many," Dr. Campoy says. "Our choices have more to do with individual case management. In all cases, we want to be sure the patient is well oxygenated, well hydrated and well monitored, with adequate blood pressure. There is no one-size-fits-all management plan."

Essential Management. In fact, case management is often more significant than the drugs used, Dr. Campoy says. "For example, we need to ensure that our equipment is in perfect working order. You can have the best anesthetic drugs in the world, but if your equipment fails to deliver oxygen, you may be



Owners who report full details of their dog's health can provide valuable clues that may impact the use of anesthesia.

putting your patient's life at risk from hypoxia [oxygen deprivation]."

Another risk: If food hasn't been withheld beforehand, the possibility of the patient's vomiting, then inhaling it into the lungs and developing aspiration pneumonia can occur.

Advanced monitoring is also helping identifying a situation before it becomes a real risk, Dr. Campoy says. "We have now affordable equipment that will monitor oxygenation, cardiac electrical activity, blood pressure, respiratory function and body temperature — all at once!"

Today's better-informed pet owners are also improving patient care. "They will often point out to their veterinarians something that is done in human practice and question why they can't do the same for their pet," Dr. Campoy says. "In doing so, they help drive the specialty forward. We are seeing more challenging cases and longer procedures, such as traffic accidents that may involve a simultaneously shattered hip, broken leg bones and massive hemorrhage. In the past, these animals may not have even made it to the ER. But today, more owners are willing to invest the time and money to help get their dogs back to full health. So diagnostics, medicine, anesthesia and surgery have all evolved together." ♦

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

To find a board-certified member of the American College of Veterinary Anesthesiologists and Analgesia in your area, please visit www.acvaa.org.

HEALTH

SKIN... (cont. from page 3)

medicated shampoos and moisturizing conditioners. Dogs may need baths two or three times a week until the condition is under control. Then the number of baths can be gradually scaled back to a maintenance level that works best.

"Sometimes nutritional supplements can improve the skin, limiting the need for bathing, but rarely will they cure the seborrhea," Dr. Miller says.

Dogs with ichthyosis or primary seborrhea should be spayed or neutered, so they don't pass the condition on to the next generation.

Acquired seborrhea can have a number of causes. They include diets that are too low in fat, low environmental humidity, excessive bathing, external parasites such as fleas and Cheyletiella mites, bacterial or yeast

infections of the skin, and various systemic diseases such as hypothyroidism or liver disease, to name a few.

"The diagnosis depends on the history, physical findings and diagnostic test results," Dr. Miller says. "The tests selected depend on which conditions are being considered."

Battery of Tests. A number of standard tests may be used to rule out other conditions or to evaluate the skin.

They include a complete blood count, biochemistry profile, urinalysis, skin scrapings, skin biopsy, skin tests for allergies, testing for the presence of skin parasites, and even an elimination diet if a food allergy is suspected.

Medicated shampoos can help to wash away dandruff. Numerous types are available in varying strengths. The veterinarian's recommendation depends

on the specific condition as well as your own preference. In cases of acquired seborrhea, bathing is needed only for a short period until the cause is resolved.

"A common example of acquired seborrhea is the dull, dry, flaky coat a dog will develop when he or she is put on a low-fat diet to control weight or some internal disease," Dr. Miller says. "Once the dietary fat is returned, the coat will return to normal and bathing can be eliminated."

If parasites, a bacterial infection or a disease such as hypothyroidism is causing the seborrhea, your dog's veterinarian will prescribe the appropriate medication to resolve the condition and a medicated shampoo to clean up the skin while the skin is healing. As time goes by, the skin will improve and the need for bathing will decrease and eventually disappear all together. ♦



Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., here with her Cairn Terrier, Denver, provided the answer on this page. Dr. Houpt is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus professor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Please Share Your Questions

We welcome questions of general interest on health, medicine and behavior. We regret however, that we cannot comment on specific products and prior diagnoses. Please send correspondence to:

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COMING UP ...

**SAYING
GOODBYE**



HEMOPHILIA



**DOOR
DARTERS**



INCONTINENCE

Daisy Gets Along With Two Other Maltese but Avoids Her New Owner

Q I adopted my daughter's teacup-size Maltese, Daisy Duke, and have two littermates from the same breeder. Daisy is 9, and my two are 6. I took care of Daisy when my daughter and her husband went on vacations, and they took mine when we traveled.

My daughter recently divorced and moved to a smaller apartment, and was gone long hours at work. Daisy suffered, and that's how I came to take her. All the dogs get along fine, but when we are together, Daisy goes into a different room. I've brought her back with us and loved on her, but she will not stay. It breaks my heart. She eats well and plays with the other dogs. I just don't understand why she excludes herself. Daisy will be excited to see my daughter and jump in her arms, but she then starts to pant until my daughter leaves.

A Those are really, really adorable dogs. Three teacups of white fluff! You were very kind to provide a home for Daisy.

As for your problem, the easiest solution is to not worry about it, but we can try to determine why Daisy is acting this way. Does she always stay a room away from you or only when you are settled down for an evening of leisure? She may actually be staying away from the other dogs. You are lucky that she is not fighting with them because spayed females, even related ones like yours, often are aggressive to one another.

We are not sure why this is, but removal of the ovaries removes the source of two hormones, estrogen and progesterone. Estrogen is secreted for a much shorter duration than progesterone. Progesterone does have a calming effect on dogs and its removal may lead to more aggression. Although you are not observing any fights, Daisy may still be uncomfortable with the other two dogs. Sharing a couch or a lap may not be pleasant for her.

The other possibility is that your location may not be a comfortable environment for her. For example, if you are watching TV, she may be avoiding the sound. I knew it was time to get hearing aids when my dog,

Denver, would leave the couch as soon as I turned on the TV. In addition, Daisy is older and, although at 9 a little dog like her is barely middle aged, she might have an ache or pain that causes her to dislike close physical contact. "Loving on her" may actually be hurting her.

What should you do? Nothing is probably the easiest option. You could teach her that being with you is desirable using food, of course. Find a treat that she really, really likes that you reserve only for the time you want her to be with you. When she is close to you, give her a tiny treat (you can cut one hotdog into 60 bits so her weight won't be affected) and repeat every minute or so that she is with you. Be careful that this does not arouse the other dogs. They could also get treats, but it would be best if you can avoid exciting all three dogs.

You could make her "away from you" space very comfortable with a nice soft bed. Once she is using the bed routinely, you could move it just a little closer to you — just six inches or so. Gradually move the bed closer every few days if she continues to use it.

What about her behavior when your daughter, her previous owner, visits? You are correct that panting can indicate anxiety, especially if the weather is cool, and Daisy has not been exerting and has no physiological reason to pant. I am not sure that dogs are able to make the leap from the sudden appearance of a familiar and much-loved person to being home alone, but I am sure she was emotionally affected by the visit. There are other signs of anxiety such as pulled-back ears, lowered tail, lip licking and yawning. You might be able to see the whites of her eyes.

Good luck with your extended family of Maltese. They are lucky dogs. ❖



Daisy Duke, left, will play with Bella and Jasmine, but then go off on her own.

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