

HAPPY NEW YEAR?????

The joys of January: tight waistbands, empty bank accounts, flu viruses, failed detox regimes, back-to-work blues. According to the Samaritans, suicide levels peak around now! Last year psychologists even declared January 24 to be the most depressing day of the year.

While it is clear January is not a good time for us, what about our pets? Can our pets also suffer from those winter blues? If they do it is not surprising as January is always one of the busiest months of the year for animal rescue centre's having to deal with pets given up after Christmas. This year approximately 4,200 dogs will be sent to a breed rescue centre because of divorce, around 3,500 due to financial difficulties and 3,300 simply because the new owners did not understand the commitment and challenges a new dog would bring.

As with people, events going on around your pet can cause them to feel depressed and [anxious](#). Changes in a dog's environment or living circumstances can trigger this. For example, dogs can experience depression and grief when another pet or human member of the household is ill or dies. This is also true when a family member moves away or changes schedules. When the Christmas holidays end and your dog is suddenly alone most of the day, after having children around, symptoms of depression triggered by [separation anxiety](#) and loneliness can occur. And of course being sent away to a dog rescue centre, away from the people and home the dog knows, is very likely to cause depression.

Other factors are also thought to trigger depression in dogs. These could include the weather and also the dog having other medical conditions that limit it's enjoyment of life. Dogs can also, like humans, suffer from clinical depression that's caused by an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. Some of these cases need to be treated with drugs such as Prozac!

So how to we know if our dog is depressed; he can't tell us! However he might show the following symptoms;

- └ Becoming withdrawn - A depressed dog may stop interacting and playing with his companions, such as his owner and family, and other dogs in the home.

- ┌ Becoming inactive - The dog might no longer show any interest in taking walks or playing. He might also tend to move slower and not seem to have much purpose to his wandering.
- ┌ Changes in appetite - The dog might lose his appetite, and this could lead to weight loss. Alternatively, a depressed dog might eat more and begin to gain weight.
- ┌ Changes in sleep habits - Depressed dogs tend to sleep more, but some may become more restless and unable to sleep well.

So what can you do if you think your dog is depressed? As soon as you notice your dog is experiencing unexplained or prolonged symptoms of depression, contact your Veterinary Surgeon. It's important to check whether or not your dog is ill or has a chemical imbalance that should be treated with medication. Once you've made sure that your pet has received proper veterinary care, you can begin looking at environmental factors that might be effecting your pet's mood and see what you can do to improve those situations.

You can improve your pets' life by giving it more attention. For example:

- ┌ Take your pet out more to give him some mental stimulation.
- ┌ If he has a favourite game or activity, try to make time for it at least once a day.
- ┌ If your pet is depressed by the loss of a canine companion, take him out to meet other dogs, or consider bringing home a new dog if this is possible in your situation.

The one thing you do want to avoid is accidentally rewarding your pet's depressed behaviour by being overly sympathetic. This could make things worse.

So if your pet, or indeed you yourself, is showing signs of those winter blues, then don't delay; take action now. Your pet can't do it for you!

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