

Oh no! He's vomited in the car again!

Car Sick? Is there anything I can do?

You've loaded five dogs into your car, and you just know that one of them is going to vomit and be very unhappy about things, even when they know that there is a lovely walk at the end of the journey as always. Carsickness occurs because of one or both of the following reasons:

- ≡ Your dog associates your car with vomiting, and you have provided your dog with the visual cues to trigger that vomiting reflex.
- ≡ Motion Sickness.

The Visual Cues

After the very first time your dog/puppy has vomited in the car, it associates that car and all the things you usually do when you leave the house with making it vomit. That is, it thinks it is the car that is causing it to feel unwell. Your natural response is to start reassuring your dog when the cues for your trip are already there and the trigger to vomit has already been pulled. This *don't worry, luv* reassuring mode you have gone into is the same as saying *well done* to your dog.

Already the following sequence to being car sick has started: *Inactivity and Listlessness* (she suddenly becomes less active than the others); *Uneasiness* (she looks around her suspiciously and keeps her body low to the ground); *Yawning and Whining* (this is the 'I want to stay at home' signal); *Salivating, drooling and swallowing* (this the sure sign that the vomiting mode has started and she has reached the point of no return); and then the *Vomiting*.

You can help your dog by undermining the visual cues by trying the following. This is referred to as 'desensitisation':

- ≡ Avoid presenting your dog with the obvious triggers like the kitchen roll under your arm.
- ≡ Do some of the things you do before she has to go in the car, but then *don't* get into the car. Do this over and over.
- ≡ Then, on another day, put her in the car – and then back out again and into the house. Make lots of cheerful, positive noises (never pacifying noises!) and carry on as normal. Do this several times. It helps to have one calm dog to accompany her. Sometimes it is the excitement of the other dogs in the group that are adding to the visual cues.
- ≡ The next steps involve moving the car for very short distances, making those same happy noises. These must be short enough so that the journey is ended before the vomiting reflex is triggered. Do this over and over. Your neighbours will think you've gone mad.
- ≡ Gradually increase the length of these little trips so that the dog dissociates the car from feeling nauseous. Your neighbours will think you are madder than ever.

- ≡ Sometimes the visual cues come from the fast-moving trees and clouds your dog can see through the car window. These dogs would be happier being on a crate out of which they cannot see. Sometimes a dog is happier when able to see out. To decide which is better, you may have to experiment.
- ≡ Having her leave the house on an empty stomach may help, but only in the sense that the volume of vomitus brought up will be less.

Motion Sickness

This is a genuine physiological problem associated with middle-ear disturbances, and is not unlike us being sea-sick. All of the visual clues, as alluded to above, may hypersensitise your dog to this separate sequence of events being stimulated. These are more difficult to manage, but doing things like changing where your dog sits in the car, and whether she is able to see out or not, may help.

And Then There are the Tablets

Any medication prescribed or recommended will always work better when combined with the desensitisation method described above. Speak to your vet, or the veterinary nurse. Currently what seems to be working best is a tablet called Cerenia. So long as your dog is older than 4 months, and the tablet is dosed 2 hours before the journey and on an empty stomach, it can block the vomiting reflex. You could use it for 2 to even 4 days in succession. It is not ideal for use when your dog vomits every time you leave the house in the car, but may be useful during your desensitisation training to try and dissociate the car and vomiting, or when planning a long journey.

Sometimes car sickness can disappear without reason as your puppy or dog gains confidence and follows a trusty leader (you). Sometimes the problem is improved, and becomes more manageable. Sometimes the problem cannot be solved. Fortunately this is rare.