

# Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

## Episode 066 Transcript – Separation Anxiety Dogs at the Vets

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-66/>

Just recently, I took my dog Percy in for elective dental treatment for a clean. And side note, I'm pretty obsessed with my dog's dental hygiene, so I brush their teeth regularly every single day. And you should too, because dental health, just like our dental health, dental health is really important for dogs. But just like us cleaning alone, brushing teeth alone isn't enough. Sometimes they need a bit of a clean too. And so that's what I decided to do. Now, while he's long recovered from his separation anxiety and we can go about our lives and do our thing, he's always going to be a dog who has had separation anxiety. And that means I'm wary of situations that might impact that, that might cause him to have a wobble.

And vet visits, especially involving those with treatment where a dog stays, can be scary for any animal, any dog, let alone a dog who's had separation anxiety. And when you've got you don't need me to tell you this, but when you've got a dog with separation anxiety, you just realize that the simple things or things that everybody else with a dog takes for granted, like vet visits, go to a whole other level of complicated. But luckily, with vet visits, there are definitely ways that we can alleviate some of that stress. And that's what this episode is all about. First of all, we're going to take a step back and understand why our dogs with separation anxiety struggle at the vets.

Hello and welcome to the Be Right Back separation anxiety podcast. Hi, I'm Julie Naismith, dog trainer, author, and full on separation anxiety geek. I've helped thousands of dogs overcome separation anxiety with my books, my online programs, my trainer certification, and my separation anxiety training app. And this podcast is all about sharing my tips and tricks to help you teach your dog how to be happy at home alone too.

Well, let's just remind ourselves of what's going on with the dog with separation anxiety and what they're worried about. Well, the thing that dogs with separation anxiety fear the most is being alone. Right, we know that. But alongside that, many of the dogs who have separation anxiety really hate being crated. Why do they hate being crated? Well, it could be that they had a really bad early experience, they were left, they hated being alone, and they happened to be in their crate too. So forever, they've associated being crated with. Being left for longer than they could cope with.

But also it might well be that the crate just creates an extra layer of isolation for these dogs. But for whatever reason, many, many dogs, most dogs with separation anxiety hate being in crates too. So think about a vet visit, particularly a vet stay. We've got a perfect storm of both of these factors

of being alone and being crated. Dogs, for example, are occasionally left alone out the back, as they say, as they wait for treatment.

They might be waiting to have tests or to recover from treatment. And it's very common practice to create dogs as they come round from anesthetic. And it makes sense because for lots of dogs there's a safety requirement and we're going to come on to later in this episode what we can do in that situation.

But is it a big deal if your dog with separation anxiety has a wobble at the vet? And the answer is yes, absolutely. If your dog has separation anxiety, we want to make sure that a stay at the vets doesn't make them worse. We don't want them going in, having a fear inducing overthreshold experience and then coming back to you worse than when they went in. And I've seen it happen too often. Lots of dogs do return from vet visits with a significant regression and we want to avoid that. And it's not down to the vet practice, it's nothing that they've done a lot of times. It's just that we haven't had a really good conversation with them about what our dog needs. So what can you do to make vet visits less stressful?

Percy's dental treatment was a success. Yay. Not only were his teeth sparkling when he came back, but he didn't suffer any regression in his anxiety. Now I'm lucky enough that I get to work with a really wonderful vet practice who understand the needs of a dog with separation anxiety. And through that and through working with my clients and helping my clients through the same situation.

Here are six things that I've learned that you need to do that really are going to make a vet visit work for your dog.

First of all, talk to your vet. If your vet doesn't already know that your dog has separation anxiety, tell them not only can they then provide general advice about how to treat separation anxiety. And by the way, if you haven't had this conversation with your vet already, do so. Regardless of whether your dog is going in for vet treatment, your vet needs to know about your dog's separation anxiety. When your vet knows about that, they can work with you, perhaps provide some general advice about separation anxiety, but also work with their team to limit the amount of isolation and crating that your dog is going to experience during the vet's day.

Okay, so when you have that conversation, the second thing I want you to do is to talk about breaking down treatment and recuperation into steps. One of the main reasons that your dog is going to be isolated is that things like blood tests, taking samples, having x rays done and so on can be done more efficiently if the hospital can take the dog and perform those procedures according to their schedule so that they fit dogs in as and when. And that makes total sense from an efficiency perspective. But it does mean that some dogs will spend a lot of time on their own. If the

treatment is elective or non urgent, then ask your vet clinic if the procedures can be split into smaller one off appointments.

What do I mean by that? Well, if your dog has to have blood tests ahead of going in for a spay neuter, ask them if the blood test can be done the day before. Doesn't always have to be done on the same day in the same process. And another option is to see if the clinic can condense the procedures into a shorter window and therefore do them all together while you wait, maybe in reception, ready to take your dog home ASAP. So if that blood test has to be done the same day as the treatment, ask if it can be done just before. Third, ask about anxiety medications for your dog's visit. Giving your dog a short acting antianxiety medication is going to go a long way to help alleviate some of the panic, and that's going to lead to a smoother vet visit and treatment process.

The anxiety medications, short acting ones that your vet will give, will typically be for home use, so you would give them ahead of the vet visit, and they're usually oral medication. You would be told by your vet to time the dose ahead of the appointment. And what you need to do, if this is the route that you're going down, is you need to test out that timing and test out the effect of that medication way ahead of the vet visit.

So don't be trying this medication for the first time on the day that you're taking your pet in. You want to be doing it earlier so you can test it out, see how it affects your dog. And by the way, these are the types of medications that are often prescribed to people who have fear of flying or a fear of a dentist. My hand is going up here. I need help when I go to the dentist because I'm phobic. And so having something that helps me feel less anxious about going to the dentist has been a game changer. In fact, I'm now way better at going to the dentist because I've been having help with anxiety medications that I've taken a couple of hours before I go. Now, some vets, depending on the dog, depending on the procedure, will also do some sedation in the clinic. But we're not talking about that here. We're talking about things that you would do at home, medications that you would give to your dog before a visit.

Your vet then might consider. And it's worth asking sedating your pet before the anesthetic actually happens. If we're talking about a treatment that's going to happen under anesthetic, some vets will happily and willingly sedate your dog beforehand. Why does that help? Because your dog's not in a panic before the anesthetic goes in, and it can definitely help with panicky dogs. And I'm led to believe this is way above my pay grade. I don't know how anesthetic works, but what vets tell me, and what I've heard other clients say, is that when a dog is a really panicky dog, it can be difficult, it can be harder for the anesthetic to take effect.

So if we can get them calm when they go in and if we can help them stay calm before the anesthetic goes in, the anesthetic works better. So ask if you can stay, by the way, when you take your pet in, when you take your dog to the vets for a treatment, ask if you can stay with your dog for as long as possible before you hand your dog over. So if your dog is going to be sedated prior to anesthetic,

ask to stay until your dog is completely out of it and your dog is then taken off to have the anesthetic administered. So many vets are very accommodating of this. Definitely ask.

If you don't ask, you don't know. The fourth thing I want you to do is ask the question, is my dog going to be left alone at any point? Because we know that's the crunch, your dog being left alone in a strange place is a likely source for panic. So ask about that. Ask, Is my dog going to be alone? And if so, what kind of state will they be sedated? Will they be under anesthetic? Will they be coming round from anesthetic?

That's what we need to know. If the answer is yes, your dog will be alone for an hour here or an hour there. Then just see if it's possible for somebody to be hanging out with your dog. Even a vet tech writing up case. Notes nearby is going to be a help.

Number five, ask about the crate. See if your vet can avoid using a crate. Obviously, crating is important for safety reasons, depending on the condition and depending on what's happening to your dog, particularly in a setting where your dog isn't going to get one to one, monitoring your dog's not at home. It's not like you are there to keep an eye on your dog every single minute. So, for safety reasons, vet clinics will often require that dogs are crated post treatment. But ask, ask if that's requirement and kind of linked back to number four, if your dog is going to be crated, is it when they're completely out of it? Well, that's fine, because if your dog's recovering from anesthetic and is crated, your dog probably isn't going to even realize that he's crated.

So ask about the situation and the circumstances in which your dog is going to be crated. And again, try to minimize the amount of scary crating time that your dog is going to have. Ask about, can my dog not be crated? You never know. It's worth asking. Maybe your vet will be open to that. Tell them how much your dog hates being in a crate. Vets very often want dogs to be crated so that the dog is safe and isn't jumping around, risking ripping out stitches. Well, dogs can jump around and freak out in crates, so your vet doesn't want that happening to your dog. If a crate is going to actually make your dog more full of life, more likely to be agitated and bounce all over the place, then the crate is not a safe place for your dog to be. So do ask about the crate and the final thing, ask how quickly you can take your dog home.

Some vets, rather, will happily prioritize discharging an anxious patient. If they know that your dog is the one that's going to freak out in the practice, they don't want that. They don't want dogs freaking out, potentially making things worse for the dog. So ask about that because they may be able to shuffle their discharge procedure, they may let you take your dog home a bit groggier than other dogs would go home. So it's worth asking. Obviously they're not going to let your dog go home with you until it's safe to do so, but it might be a bit quicker than if you hadn't asked about the timing of your dog coming home. So definitely, definitely go through this one. What you don't want is your dog waiting till the end of the day unnecessarily, just because you didn't have a conversation about when's the soonest I can bring my dog home.

So those six things to think about are what to do when your dog is going through a non urgent or maybe urgent but elective process, not an emergency. So what about emergencies? Well, of course, if it's an emergency, you're going to forget most of these practices because getting your dog in for treatment in an emergency, that's your priority, that's going to take precedence over your dog's anxiety in that moment. But there are still things you could ask about on the post treatment process.

So, yes, it's an emergency if your dog swallowed a sock yet been there, your dog is going to go in, you're just going to deal with the emergency. But for recovery, you can still ask about that. You can still ask when's, as soon as he can come home, does he have to be created? Is he going to be alone? So you can still talk about the post treatment transition. Finally, I want to end on reiterating that we're not talking about prioritizing physical health over mental health or mental health over physical health. Both are essential for our dogs. And a growing number of vets are beginning to really understand the impact of a fear-filled vet visit.

And they don't want that. Vets who really get the fear free principle commit to doing what they can to make your dog's visit more bearable. So if you're having conversations with your vet about fear free visits, and maybe not getting the responses that you want. Definitely look for vets who are bought into the principle of fear free veterinary treatment, because if a dog becomes so frightened of going to the vets that you stop taking them, then their physical health is going to be at risk. So it's not either or, and I don't want you to be put off taking your dog to the vets because you're worried about your dog regressing. So finding a vet who really understands and there are so many of them out there is going to be the key to this, because there are definitely things you can do to make it a better process and a better outcome all round.

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of the Be Right Back Separation Anxiety podcast. If you want to find out more about how I can help you further, head over to [Julienasmith.com](https://julienasmith.com). Meanwhile, if you enjoyed listening today, I would love it if you would head over to wherever you listen to your podcast and consider rating my show. Thanks so much. Good luck with that training, and bye for now.