



CALMING CANINE SEPARATION ANXIETY

by Jean Scherwenka and Melissa Stephany

"We've got to get help for this dog or she's going to kill herself," said Jan Crommack to her husband when the couple returned to their Baltimore home one evening to find Max, their 5-1/2 year-old Spaniel mix, barking, banged up, covered with slobber, and peering wild-eyed through the bent wires of his crate. Max's first anxiety attack occurred when he turned 5, and since then, the attacks had escalated. After trying what seemed like everything Western medicine had to offer, Jan explored the option of using Chinese herbs. That ended up being the miracle that saved his life and his sanity.

Anxiety in dogs can manifest in different ways such as thunder phobia, fear of loud noises, fear aggression, and in Max's case, separation anxiety. We've all heard versions of the separation anxiety story, when a

family leaves the dog home alone and returns to find their couch shredded, the carpet chewed up, or the dog's nails or teeth bloody from clawing and chewing at the door. Whatever the mess, it reflects the dog's panic and overwhelming anxiety related to his owner's absence.

In Western medicine, we may think of anxiety as a neurosis or a mental behavior issue, but Eastern thinking looks at anxiety as a physical issue.

For thousands of years, an entire region of the world has thrived on and documented the results of using Chinese herbs, but few in the United States are familiar with their healing potential, especially in the animal world. Dr. Chris Bessent, holistic veterinarian and founder of Herbsmith Inc., started using Chinese herbs three years into her 22-year veterinary practice. She explains that as

more of us turn to alternative or complementary methods to create and maintain good health for our dogs, the option of using Chinese herbs should be explored.

From a Chinese perspective, separation anxiety reflects a disturbance in the dog's *heart shen*. Heart shen is the ability to feel settled and relaxed in an environment, and animals with a poor heart shen have difficulty doing that. If left unchecked, a poor heart shen could eventually develop into other conditions.

Chinese medicine distills the entire world into five elements: fire, earth, metal, water, and wood. An animal's body is viewed the same way. Certain elements control others, and all are affected by each other in a cyclical way. For example, the heart is the fire element, and the kidney is the water element; so it makes sense that



the kidney (water) controls the heart (fire). When there is a disturbance or imbalance or disharmony in the heart fire, the kidney, being the water element, should be able to control it. Tonifying the kidney increases its ability to control the heart, which then allows the animal's body to keep anxiety in check. That's what Chinese herbs do.

Many people, at least those in Western countries, prefer a pill that does the same thing that an herb will do; that is resolve the problem, but do it *quickly*. Because many of us are hooked on the quick fix, the average person frequently reports, "I gave the herb, and he wasn't different the next morning." But he may truly *be* different. The herbs begin working from the inside out, and though gradual, there is nearly always improvement. The dog's progress can usually be noticed in two weeks, and two weeks after that he's "much better than a month ago." After six months of treatment with herbs, Dr. Bessent often hears, "Wow! I can't believe I lived with that other dog!"

"That's what I really love about the Chinese herbs," says Dr. Bessent. "By taking care of the root problem within the dog, you're heading off more problems and building health for the animal's future. It's not an overnight fix, but in the end that dog's overall life is vastly improved."

Today Max is a healthy 9 year old, and according to Jan, "He's happy all the time. And every minute of his life is going to be a better minute for him and for me!"

After several years of practicing, Dr. Bessent has extended the benefit of her knowledge of Chinese medicine, originally limited to those animals she saw in her practice, through developing the Herbsmith line of formulae specifically for dogs. One of the formulae, Herbsmith Calm Shen, supports the kidney to control the heart shen. In other words, it is formulated to calm anxious behavior in dogs.

Dr. Chris Bessent practices holistic and traditional veterinary medicine at her clinic in Southeastern Wisconsin. She can be reached at mail@herbsmithinc.com or 800.624.6429.

To learn more about Herbsmith, visit www.herbsmithinc.com.



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