

NO NEED TO DREAD A CAR RIDE

Common Sense Motion Sickness Busters

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Most of us have been there – soiled dog beds, miserable pooches, that unmistakable acrid smell of dog vomit. Motion sickness is no fun for dogs or their care givers. Luckily, there are things we can do to avoid it.

Most puppies outgrow this unpleasant condition, but some unlucky ones remain affected all their lives. My Holly Bee is one of them. Her motion sickness is both severe and long-term. In dealing with Holly's car sickness, I developed a number of successful strategies to minimize the condition and to help Holly to cope with it. I hope you find them helpful.



Understanding the mechanism behind motion sickness helped me most in addressing it. I learned that travel sickness is a result of stimulation of the vestibular apparatus located within the inner ear. The most common hypothesis for the cause of it is that it functions as a defense mechanism against poisons. There is a part of the brain, called *area postrema*, responsible for inducing vomiting when toxins are detected in the body. When a dog feels the motion without seeing the cause of it the brain jumps to a conclusion that the experience is a hallucination due to ingesting neurotoxins. In other words, air sickness occurs when the brain receives conflicting messages from the body affecting balance

and equilibrium. Car sickness is more commonly seen in puppies and young dogs, just as it afflicts more children than adults. The ear structures used for balance are not fully developed in puppies and the brain cannot cope with the conflicting messages. Sometimes the problem may be an improperly formed middle ear, but most commonly it is a function of the brain overreacting to the stimulus of moving.

The severity of motion sickness varies from mild, when the dog is only yawning, whining and drooling to severe, which might involve explosive vomiting and diarrhea.

There are some common sense ways to help mitigate motion sickness:

1. Condition your terrier for positive experience. Consider spending some time in a parked car with your dog. Take her for really short and fun trips. Drive around the block and have a fantastic play session afterwards. Go to the car for a doggy massage session or just some one-on-one time, with lots of petting and attention. I spent many, many hours in the car with Holly without the

car moving; just sitting in the driveway. I would either read or work on my laptop and Holly eventually learned to settle and not be anxious in the car.

2. Take your dog for a walk before any travel. This is especially important when you plan on travelling far. Make the time for a really long walk. A tired dog is a less anxious dog. The brain will be less reactive.
3. Do not give any food or drink before a car trip. My rule of thumb is 6 hours of no food and little or no water, before any longer trips. The idea is to send messages to the brain that the stomach is empty. There is no poison there to get rid of.
4. One exception to *no eating rule* is ginger. Give one ginger cookie to settle the stomach about 30 minutes before a trip. Ginger is a traditional remedy for nausea. I found it especially helpful for puppies. Puppies should not be kept hungry.
5. When driving, open windows for fresh air or at least lower them a bit. It is important to lower them on both sides of the car. This helps balance the air pressure inside the car with the air pressure outside, which may help reduce your dog's nausea and discomfort.
6. Locate the car seat or the crate in a place that allows a view of the far horizon. Again, the idea is to reconcile in the brain the visual stimuli with the feeling of motion. Conversely, if possible avoid the most bouncy parts of the vehicle and those closed off from seeing out the window, like the back of a van.
7. Avoid any food or any products with strong smells in the car, which may stimulate the brain further into thinking that the *poison* is still there and may agitate the motion sickness.
8. Drive as smooth as possible – avoiding sudden stops, fast turns, bumpy roads. The less the little terrier body is thrown around the better. After all, it is all about balance and equilibrium.
9. Make frequent stops to allow a feeling of the solid ground under the paws.

If the above methods are not enough you may want to consider medication. Pharmacological intervention was my last resort but it worked very well for Holly. For her, none of the natural remedies worked (we tried about a dozen or so), nor any of the over-the-counter motion sickness remedies for children that our vet suggested to try. The good news is that Pfizer came out with Cerenia, the only medicine specifically formulated for canines. Cerenia, along with other measures I shared above, allows Holly Bee to travel without vomiting. It is a prescription drug specifically formulated for motion sickness in dogs without causing drowsiness. It is a relatively new medication, so I was hesitant to use it, but it proved incredibly effective for Holly and made our life much happier.

When the Norwich terrier breed was created, understandably motion sickness was not in the realm of even the most remote consideration. And so, unfortunately, car sickness seems to be relatively common in this breed, especially in puppyhood. I hope you will enjoy quality time with your Norwich in a parked car, and on a long walk, and then you set off on a smooth ride.