

Pet Talk Tuesdays – 6/2/2020

Nick Rusch:

In the studio this morning it's our friend Dr. Marty Greer from Veterinary Village in Lomira. Doctor, how are you?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm doing great. Finally we have summer.

Nick Rusch:

Summer's nice. Summer's good. I'm a fan. When we get to this time of year, the pets of course, we like to get out with them. They need more water than ever, that's for sure.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yep. Yep. What I want to talk about today is pet anxiety. Not anxiety about having a pet or not having a pet, but your pet's anxiety. There's a lot more anxiety in our pets than I think people really recognize about their dogs and cats. I don't want to leave out the kitties.

Nick Rusch:

No. Of course not.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I think it's really important that we talk about it. This is a little bit seasonal in that anxiety can be aggravated by thunderstorms, fireworks, changes in schedule, just a lot of things can really upset our pets.

Nick Rusch:

I don't want to take you off track; I know that they have the thunder shirts available.

Dr. Marty Greer:

They do.

Nick Rusch:

Do they really seem to work?

Dr. Marty Greer:

They do to a low level. They're basically a shirt that goes around your pet that you can snug up. They make them for cats. They make them for dogs. Humorously last year, April 1st, they made them for people. They actually didn't, but they had a whole spoof webpage about it.

Nick Rusch:

I don't know. Everybody's a little edgy right now; might not be a bad idea.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You aren't really kidding about that, yes, so it might just pay off. They had them for the workplace, for those conflicts that you had at work and all those things. Anyway, back on track.

They do make them for dogs. They're basically a shirt that has Velcro on it that you can then snugly put around your dog or cat. The point of it is it's sort of like swaddling a baby. It's supposed to be soothing and calming.

Nick Rusch:

Comfort them-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. My sister's dog used one for a while and it seemed to really help him.

Nick Rusch:

Seemed to help, good.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. It may not be enough for the really high anxiety level pets, but it can be useful as one tool. We also have pheromones and we have drugs, and then there's natural supplements. I think we need to talk about how those all fit together.

Nick Rusch:

Is it the noise? It seems like some pets can sense it. You can take a look outside before the storm even hits. Right about the time I'd still be out on the bike and my wife would be upset. She might have that that too.

Dr. Marty Greer:

She might. Have to get her a thunder shirt.

Nick Rusch:

You can see it. It is a visible change in them.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. Barometric pressure changes do affect our pets. They do start to feel those. That's called back chaining. That's a psychological process by which first the pet is afraid of the loud thunder booms, and then they start to realize that that's associated with the lightning flashes, and then they realize it's associated with the rain, and then before it starts to rain, they start to feel the barometric pressure changes, so they back chain. In other words, they look further and further ahead based on the barometric pressure changes, which they can be sensitive to. Some people are too. If you've had especially orthopedic problems, you'll feel it in your joints.

The year of the Oakfield tornado, we had people that told us that their dogs had been hiding in closets for three days before the tornado.

Nick Rusch:

Isn't that something.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So they know.

Nick Rusch:

They know, yep, yep.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. More baby wild animals are born just before a thunderstorm. The barometric pressure changes actually induce labor in cows and some of the other animals. Yeah. I can't make this stuff up.

Nick Rusch:

Now, just hang on a second.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You can't make this stuff. It's true.

Nick Rusch:

I know. I enjoy learning something new every day, but when I think about the fact that my dad was one of the smartest people about animal husbandry I've ever met in my life, I never heard that one before.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's true.

Nick Rusch:

So now you're just freaking me out.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's true. If you think about wildlife; cows and wild bovine species or deer or whatever it happens to be, the babies are born with the expectation that within 30 minutes to an hour of the time they're born, they're up on their feet, they're able to run. So if they're born just before a storm when all the prey animals, the wolves and the fox, and all those things tend to hunker down and not be out looking for something to eat, it makes sense that they would be born before that so they would have a little extra time to get up.

Nick Rusch:

It's evolution kid.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It totally is evolution.

Nick Rusch:

It totally is evolution.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's pretty cool.

Nick Rusch:

Let's talk about some of the other ... we talked about the thunder shirts. First of all, are there breeds that are more susceptible? We would think that would affect the smaller dogs more. Am I stretching too far?

Dr. Marty Greer:

No, I think that's probably true. Because we see so many rescue dogs now, dogs that come through that aren't pure bred or purpose bred dogs, we see a lot of rescue dogs moving into Wisconsin because we don't have enough dogs from our regular sources. Believe it or not, our shelters are empty.

Nick Rusch:

Wow.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I know. Here's another little bit of news for you. Our shelters are empty. They have been empty for several years. It's not just because of COVID; it's because we've done such a great job in the Northern tier of States of spaying and neutering our pets that we just don't have that overpopulation. Most of the dogs that we see in the shelters ... not cats ... cats are a whole different subject.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah, there's plenty of cats.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Never going to be a shortage of cats. But dogs, we started to see a shortage. They were moving dogs. A lot of really great rescues. We see a lot of really hardworking, dedicated people working with rescue animals. So I'm not trying to make a negative comment here in any way about rescues, but I'll tell you a lot of rescues come with some emotional baggage. So we do tend to see higher levels of anxiety in many of those.

Nick Rusch:

A lot of them have had a rough life in one way or another, whether they've been living rough or whether they've been abused or whatever the situation.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Transported too young. There's a whole array of reasons that these poor little dogs do have some anxiety. So they're kind of a project for a lot of people. They need to know before they walk into that, that they may have a greater chance of anxiety. There's generalized anxiety, there's separation anxiety, there's thunderstorm and lightening and fireworks anxiety. There's different kinds of anxiety. I think it's important that we discuss that. And yes, there are differences in different breeds, but I can't sit here and rattle off a list of breeds that are affected.

Nick Rusch:

I'm sure any breed of any dog that's had some sort of trauma in his or her life I mean, they might be susceptible to anxiety.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Nick Rusch:

Sometimes you can pinpoint something, sometimes you can't.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. People will interpret things like, "Well I picked up a broom and he ran away, so he must've been hit with a broom." Well not necessarily. It means at some point the wind may have blown open the door in the room that you were holding it open with blew over and it startled the dog. There's a thousand reasons that dogs can develop anxiety, so we can't assume that it's always abuse.

Nick Rusch:

You brought up a few other options, pheromones and drugs. Let's talk about the other options.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And natural supplements.

Nick Rusch:

Natural supplements, yes.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Natural supplements we'll do that quickly first. They are not quite as reliable as drugs, but they can be useful. My favorite one is called July Third. It's made by Herbsmith, which is an Oconomowoc, Wisconsin based company. Christine Bessent owns the company. She's a veterinarian that's very skilled in Eastern medicine and does a tremendous job of putting together herbal supplements. I think it's a really great product if somebody is looking for something. We need to talk about the drugs in two categories.

Nick Rusch:

The supplements, is that a good stepping stone? Is it good idea to start there before you go into the drugs?

Dr. Marty Greer:

For a lot of people that don't want to rely on drugs, that's a good place to start. And if it doesn't get them where they want to be, then of course we can always-

Nick Rusch:

Move in to-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. There's two categories of herbal supplements and drugs. We need to split those up.

One is the kind you use episodically when there's likely to be an episode of fear; going to the groomer, going to the vet, having a thunderstorm, having your neighbors start blowing up fireworks. That's why she calls it July Third is because you can use it starting on July 3rd and it'll still get you an effect. There are drugs like that. That would be Gabapentin and Trazodone and alprazolam. Some of those drugs that work very quickly and can get us a good effect for a specific episodic crisis that a dog may have emotionally that causes them anxiety.

The other drug class or herbal supplement class are more long acting. You're in it for the marathon, not for the sprint. They can sometimes be used together depending on which drugs you're picking or which supplements you're picking. So you want to make sure you understand which drug class they're in and you don't overlap drugs that are inappropriately used together because we can see some unfortunate syndromes if that happens. So you want to be really careful that you're not just pulling something out of your cupboard, taking your medication, and giving it to your dog because that is not appropriate.

Nick Rusch:

No.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. It's shocking to me how many people are like, "Well I take this, so I'll give half of it to my dog."

Nick Rusch:

Really?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. It's stunning how many people do that.

Nick Rusch:

Oh my gosh.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Yeah, so you want to be really conscientious.

Nick Rusch:

With no thought that the physiology doesn't work? I mean we're talking about different creatures.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Yeah. And you don't know the dose. So please don't do that.

Nick Rusch:

Never do that.

Dr. Marty Greer:

No. If you have a problem with anxiety, please give your veterinarian a call, give us a call. We're happy to talk to you about what choices you have.

We then have the long acting drugs like Clomipramine and Fluoxetine, which is Prozac. We have a lot of really great drugs, but those can take six to eight weeks to get an effect. So you're not going to want to use Fluoxetine for tomorrow's thunderstorm. It's not going to get you where you want to be. And we always want to start off on a low drug dose and then slowly build up until we get to the point that we have it.

And then there's a lot of people who think this means their pet is going to be on drugs for the rest of their life or that we're going to sedate them and just have them zoned out. And that is in no way the goal of veterinarians. We want to make them happy. We want to make them comfortable in your life. But there's a lot of dogs that walk through this world with generalized anxiety and owners don't always recognize it because the dog's always acted that way. They don't realize it until I'm in the exam room with them, and the dog is hiding into the chair and we start to have a conversation. They're like, "Yeah, I noticed that. And yeah, I ... ". And pretty soon they realize that their dog is living under this little black cloud of chronic anxiety. That's no great lifestyle for our dogs, for ourselves.

We can do a lot of things to help the dogs to feel better. Some of the drugs like Prozac, Fluoxetine, are very, very affordable. They're not expensive medications. They're easy to get. And yes, it takes a while to get them to that drug level, but in the process of doing that we can use Gabapentin, alprazolam, one of the other drugs on top of it. Xanax is alprazolam, Valium. Some of those other drugs can be used on top of the long acting medication to get you where you need to be in the crisis.

The goal ultimately is for your dog to learn that they're not going to die when they go to the vet, they're not going to die when they go to the groomer, they're not going to die because there's a thunderstorm. I mean, these are true panic attacks. These are not just my dog's a little nervous. Your dog is truly having a panic attack and you need to recognize that we can help them learn that they will get through that crisis and so it's not so terrible. They're not going to be drugged. They're not going to be zoned out. We'll adjust medications. We can play with meds until we get the right combination. Not every dog needs the same medication, just like not every person does.

Nick Rusch:

Sure. Is the goal down the road then once they've had a little more experience and they realize this isn't so bad, to gradually wean them back off the drugs?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. Yeah, exactly. That's where the herbal things can be supplements that can help with that. That's where the drugs in different combinations can be really useful. And then we do have pheromones, which we don't want to leave out of the conversation. Some people think they work pretty well, other people aren't fans. But the only way to tell if it works for your pet is to try it.

For cats, we have Feliway; for dogs we have Adaptil. It used to be called DAP, dog appeasement pheromone. The Feliway, the cat one is a synthesized pheromone from the chin of cats. So when you see cats rub their chin on the corner

of the wall, or the door or something, there's scent marking. And so that's a scent that they've synthesized and put into one of the Feliways.

They have a Feliway multi-cat. So if you have a multiple cat household and you're having some anxiety and stress, like one cat is laying in the hall and not letting the other cat down the hall to use the litter box, and then the other cat isn't using the litter box so they use the couch, those kinds of things can be helpful.

Nick Rusch:

And that does happen.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It happens way often. Sometimes again, people don't recognize it until they go back and video, and then watch the video and see what the body language and what's actually going on between the cats or between the dogs what's happening.

For dogs is called Adaptil. It comes as a collar. Cats don't come as a collar. Cats just come as a spray or a room atomizer. The dog one comes as a room atomizer, a spray, a collar. They come in different forms. The room atomizer plugs in like one of the Glade or Renuzit wall things. The heat of it disperses the pheromone into the room.

Pheromones are actually a hormone that your dog makes. The one for cats, like I said, comes from their chin. The one for dogs comes from the placenta of the mother dog. We know that's a calming effect.

We use that and it's really fascinating to see how that works. We use a lot of those collars in the practice and they work really well. They really help the pet to calm and relax. If you have three dogs in the house and they all are glaring at each other regularly, and you have to only let one outside at a time, and you have this whole chaos at your house because you have these multiple pet habits, then there are things we can do to help with pheromones, with supplements, with drugs and with thunder shirts. So we have some really good approaches for anxiety.

Nick Rusch:

Some of the longterm that you've seen in your practice, have you seen some real success stories that you can look back and say, "Wow, it's a good thing we did something?"

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh yeah. Yeah, the Gabapentin, the Trazodone before the office visits for cats and for dogs make a huge difference. Gabapentin is really safe. We give it to the cats the night before their appointment and the morning of their appointment if they're a difficult cat. And a lot of them are. A lot of them really just don't like going to the vet. So instead of us having this cat that's hissing and scratching and yelling in the back of the carrier, we give him Gabapentin the night before, the morning of we bring them in, they get out of the carrier and they're just like this little lump on the exam table. Clients are stunned. They're like, "Oh my gosh, this is so much better." It's better for the client. It's better for the cat. It's better for us.

We don't need to stress your cat out. There's really no reason. We know cats don't stress as well at the veterinary clinic as dogs. Even dogs don't love us, many of them. Some do. I mean, ginger snaps and peanut butter are the best thing in the world, and they're going to drag you through the front door. But then we have the other subset that aren't really all that thrilled about being there.

We work really hard in our practice to make it fun and to make it happy. But sometimes you just need to say, "Okay Gabapentin is my friend," and there's nothing wrong with two doses of Gabapentin. It's safe. It's inexpensive. It can be very helpful for your pet to get through those visits.

Nick Rusch:

Well the vet visits, as you mentioned too, anytime you disrupt the animal's routine, they get upset because they spend their day laying out the routine. "Okay, this is what I do at this time. You go to work, I go over here." They've mapped it out and disruption in that routine, they're not fans.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. A lot of people are home more now because of all the things that are going on, and they're noticing that their dog is exhausted. "We've been on four walks. I haven't gotten all my naps in today and I just can't quite cope with this new schedule." So some of them are having some difficulty.

The other thing I really want to talk about is all the new puppies that we've seen come into the practice. It's been great because people are home. They're home with the kids. They're like, "Well we're home till September, let's get a puppy." We love that. But we want to make sure that people are teaching their puppies to use crates and to know how to soothe themselves so that they can be alone so when you do go back to work or school in the fall, that your pet knows how to respond to that.

Nick Rusch:

So they're not traumatized then?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Nick Rusch:

I always get a kick out of it. I probably brought this up with you before. When people would say to me, "He's so glad to see me when I get home from work." It's like, "Well yeah, he put out an all points bulletin. If you left at 7:30, he was dialing 911 at 7:45, because their sense of time is not the same as yours.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Nick Rusch:

So glad to see you. Heck yeah. Heck yeah.

Nick Rusch:

We get a lot of stuff in our show prep that we call ... there's a big stack of it right there. Haven't been through today's yet. There's that exact topic that you brought up, that a lot of people have been working at home or maybe they're furloughed or their work schedules are a little different, sometimes the animals adapt quickly and they're fine with it. And other times it's like, "What the heck?"

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Right. It really depends a lot on that personality of that dog. Some dogs are really easy going. They roll with the flow; they'll do anything that goes. But there are other dogs that are pretty set in their ways, and we need to respect that and understand it and know that there are things we can do to help them.

Like I said, really make sure your puppies, if you're getting puppies right now, know how to handle themselves when you're gone. Because if you're home 24 hours a day, you're there, the kids are there, the dog is never alone. And suddenly you go back to work in the fall or school in the fall, that's really going to mess with their heads. So don't be shocked that your dog may have some anxiety and some issues. So please, please, please don't wait until you're in a crisis and the dog is ripping the crate apart, hurting themselves. Yeah.

We're actually in the process of putting out a new book called The Pandemic Puppy. We have seen that many puppies in the practice. It is crazy, and it's wonderful. Like I said, a lot of shelters are empty, the foster homes are filled. It's great. We love it, but we want to make sure that those puppies don't end up back in the system at the end of the season.

Nick Rusch:

Great stuff doc. We could have probably gone for an hour and a half today. Give us the contact information.

Dr. Marty Greer:

We're at Veterinary Village. That's the corner of Highway 41 and 49, just south of Fond Du Lac. It's the big red building on the southeast corner, across from Quad. Our phone is 920-269-4000. And our website is smallanimalclinic.com.

Nick Rusch:

Okay, my wife just went back to work this week. She's been working at home. She never stopped working. I don't know if she's having separation anxiety or not.

Dr. Marty Greer:

She might be glad.

Nick Rusch:

Got any kind of drugs you can recommend for me doc?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sorry, outside my league.

Nick Rusch:

That's right; different drugs. We going to stay on top of it.

Nick Rusch:

Pet Talk Tuesday, Dr. Marty Greer. Always fun, always smart, and always lots of great information for you. Veterinary Village in Lomira. This is always one of the highlights of my week.