

Dog and Small Animals Vet



Dr Adam Gordon - Maroubra Veterinary Hospital

Adam Gordon graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. He completed a Masters degree in Veterinary Studies at Murdoch University in 2002. Adam has been in companion animal practice since 1990 and is principal of Maroubra Veterinary Hospital.

88 Bunnerong Road, Pagewood NSW 2035
Phone: (02) 9344 8722
Website: www.maroubravet.com.au

Dear Dr Adam,

I have a 'highly strung' dog. Xander is a German Shorthaired Pointer and is approaching five years old. He's just really nervy and despite getting training and having behavioural advice I just feel that he's never at ease. A dog walking friend suggested doggie Prozac. At first I thought it was a joke but another work colleague said they'd heard about it. What can you tell me about it and does it 'chill' out a tense and anxious dog? I will add that Xander doesn't suffer separation anxiety he's just really tense walking with traffic, skateboards, sudden noises and other dogs. He's not aggressive - just skittish and like a horse, shies from sudden noises.

Sincerely,
Bree Williams
Rockdale

Hi Bree. Sorry to hear you are having these problems with Xander. Behavioural problems are amongst the most frustrating problems that veterinarians deal with. I think you are on the right track with what you have been doing, but I am also sure that with some extra work we could dramatically improve things.

Your friend is absolutely right that we use Prozac (the active drug is actually called fluoxetine) in our companion animals. Having said that, it is important to understand that there is no "magic pill" for curing behavioural problems. Management should always consist of behavioural modification techniques, as well as medications if they are deemed appropriate by your veterinarian.

I think it would be a great idea for you to seek the services of a veterinarian who is a specialist in animal behaviour. There are not many of them, but your veterinarian can organise a referral to one. Your veterinarian will also conduct a thorough examination to ensure there are no underlying health issues that may be contributing to Xander's anxiety. Results from behavioural modification can take a while, but if you are persistent and consistent, the results should come.

There are a number of things that you can start working on to try and reduce Xander's anxiety. Firstly, be positive and confident when you are walking him. Using a head collar when walking him will be helpful. In situations that cause anxiety he may look to you for support. Dogs are very adept at interpreting our body language, so try and remain relaxed and breathe deeply. You could also use some dog calming signals such as blinking your eyelids slowly, yawning and turning away or licking your lips. In a situation that is causing anxiety you should avoid making eye contact with Xander and also ignore the distraction (eg. Skateboard, loud car or truck).

Positive reinforcement is an important component of behaviour modification. This means rewarding calm behaviour consistently. You can use food rewards, affection and soothing praise. Identifying the circumstances that cause him anxiety will be helpful in modifying his behaviour. Once you have done this, you can then embark on a process of desensitization. This means gradual controlled exposure to the things that cause anxiety and rewarding calm behaviour. This can be a time consuming process.

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Making sure that Xander has plenty of both mental and physical stimulation will be helpful in giving him a sense of well being. Regular exercise and play time, including off leash exercise is important. Toys such as Kongs with hidden treats provide mental stimulation. You might want to consider playing soft music and burning aromatic oils at home when things are quiet. This can be relaxing for some dogs.

Another non drug remedy that can be used to reduce anxiety is pheromones. There is a product called dog appeasing pheromone (DAP) which is supplied as a plug in diffuser that can be used in the home. It constantly releases a synthetic form of the pheromone that dogs produce when they are lactating and feeding their puppies.

These pheromones calm the puppy during times of stress and provide reassurance. They have been shown to have the same effect in adult dogs as well. This may be helpful in reducing anxiety in the home environment. It will soon be available as part of a collar that the dog wears. This form may be more useful for Xander as it sounds like a lot of his anxiety arises when he is out of his home environment.

So back to your question on fluoxetine. It certainly can reduce anxiety levels in conjunction with a behaviour modification plan as I have outlined above. There are some important points that need to be considered before starting on a medicine such as this.

Fluoxetine is a prescription drug that is not currently registered for use in dogs in Australia. It can however be prescribed by your veterinarian under certain

conditions. Xander would have to be examined by your veterinarian before it was prescribed. Your vet may also wish to perform some screening blood tests to ensure that he is in good health.

This drug is now registered for use in dogs in the United States and has been used widely in Australia and has proven to be effective and well tolerated by the majority of dogs. Like any drug there can be side effects and your veterinarian will discuss these with you if the decision is made to use it. It may also take 6 to 8 weeks before you see a response to the medication.

The decision on whether Xander should be treated with medication needs to be made by your veterinarian after a thorough consultation has been done. In the meantime, remember that behavioural modification plays a major role in dealing with problems such as anxiety, and big improvements can be seen with the techniques I've suggested.

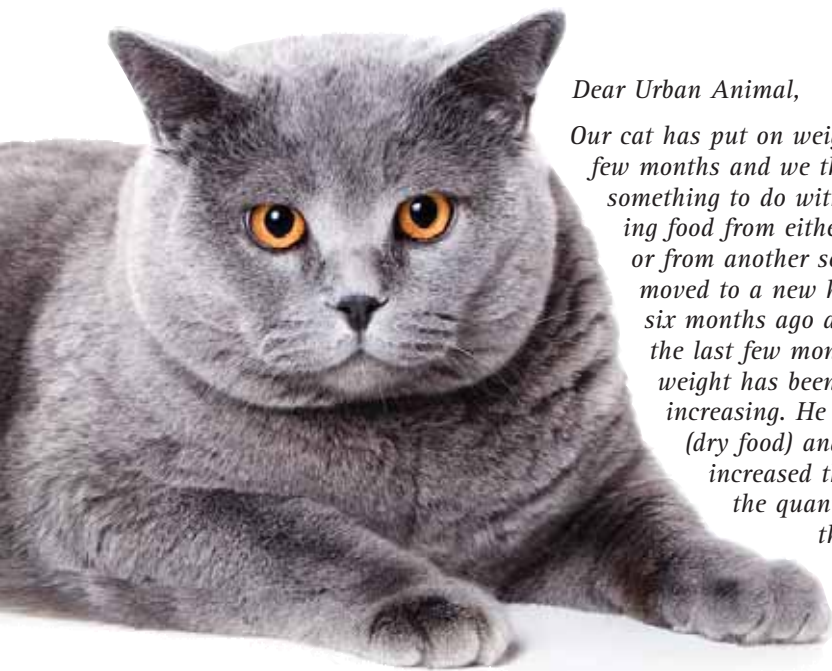
Cat Vet



Melissa Catt BVSc MACVSc (feline)
Paddington Cat Hospital

Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral, in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

183 Glenmore Road, Paddington NSW 2021
Phone: (02) 9380 6111 Website: www.catvet.com.au



Dear Urban Animal,

Our cat has put on weight in the last few months and we think it could be something to do with him scavenging food from either a neighbour or from another source. We moved to a new house just under six months ago and it's been in the last few months that the weight has been noticeably increasing. He gets crunchies (dry food) and we haven't increased this or changed the quantity/quality of the diet.

Follows on the next page...

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Because animals matter

I'm thinking of getting a tag that say's "Please Do NOT Feed Me" to discourage any possible neighbour that is giving him food on the side. Should we keep him inside and decrease the quantity of food given or is there a diet you can recommend? He used to have a waist and now he doesn't!

Karen Tse

Dear Karen,

I find it's a lot easier to put weight on than to take it off, and the same goes for our feline friends! If the food intake at home has remained the same, and your cat is definitely heavier, then either he is getting fed elsewhere or his energy expenditure has reduced. Bodyweight in an otherwise healthy cat is a factor of energy in (ie food) and energy out (ie exercise). If you can get an accurate weight of your cat that would be helpful- if you have scales at home then weigh yourself while holding him, then minus your weight from the total to get his bodyweight. That way you know the starting point and can have an idea if the path you are taking is effective. You can

then reweigh every two weeks, and aim to gradually reduce his bodyweight by an average of 100g each week (it is important not to reduce his weight too quickly).

I assume that with outside access your cat is exercising similarly to before the move. You can certainly try to ensure he has a good active lifestyle by playing with him for ten minutes or so every day. This helps with general health, preventing things like diabetes, and makes life more fun for both of you! Each individual cat has their own preference for the type of play they like, so you may need to experiment.

To be sure you know exactly how much food he is getting, you will need to measure it. As a general guideline, dry food is much more concentrated than tinned food (because it has very little water in it, as opposed to tinned food in which approximately three quarters of the food is actually water) and it is much easier for cats to gain weight when they have a lot of dry food in their diet. It is often helpful to work out the amount of calories they are ingesting each day, and you may need to consult with your vet about this, so they can help you work out the caloric intake. If you tend to feed him as he asks for it, or top his food up every so often, then changing the pattern of feeding to giving him a measured portion every day is recommended. For example, if you want him to have half a cup of dental dry food and half a tin of food each day, then measure the dry food into a container with a lid in the morning and feed him small portions over the day as he asks for it from his measured amount. That means he can have multiple small meals, but a specific amount of food.

I would recommend continuing him outside access if this is his normal lifestyle, as this is likely to give him good exercise time (but inside at night!). I think a 'do not feed me' tag would be worthwhile, and even speaking directly to neighbours about the situation- most people are responsive to this. There are some good weight reduction diets out there, but the first thing to do is know exactly how much he is getting, and introducing some tinned foods instead of 100% dry food.

Hope this helps!

**Dr Alex Rosenwax – BVSC MACVSc (Avian Health)
Bird & Exotics Veterinarian, Green Square.**

Alex graduated from the University of Sydney in 1991. He achieved Membership of the Avian Health Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in 1996. In November 1996 he opened the first and only Sydney all bird and exotic pet practice. The Clinic moved to 1 Hunter St Waterloo in 2003 and sees approximately 80% birds, and 20% fish, reptiles and other exotic pets. Alex is the current president of the Australian Veterinary Association Avian Group.

Shop 3, Block D, 1 Hunter St Waterloo, Sydney 2017
Ph: (02) 9319 6111 <http://www.birdvet.com.au>



Bird and Exotics Vet



I have a pet Lovebird called Whisper who I've had for three years now. He's very healthy and happy and enjoys the company of other parrots. A friend often bring his Alexandrine over for play dates. Recently this has stopped because of a health scare-his parrot had a suspected case of Chlamydia. I know what Chlamydia is as a disease in humans but all my searches for this for birds seems to come up with some scary information. Can you tell me what the risk factors are and can a healthy bird contract it from another through just normal play contact?

infected with chlamydia will become sick with chlamydia or even become infected with it.

Birds and people become infected with Chlamydia when the bacteria, which is found in feather dust and dried up faeces (bird droppings), is dispersed by air circulation. It will survive for up to several months in the environment around us even after the birds are gone. Chlamydia is regularly or occasionally shed in the faeces, urine, nasal and eye discharges of the bird. It is important to remember that many birds with no signs of illness can be shedding (passing on) chlamydia from their body. This includes your friend's bird.

The short term signs of a Chlamydiosis to look for in your birds are being "fluffed up" and lethargic (tired and quiet); conjunctivitis and sinusitis; yellowish to greenish droppings; difficulty breathing; weight loss and dehydration and in some cases unfortunately even death.

The signs of low grade or long term Chlamydiosis to look for in your birds are progressive emaciation (weight loss); greenish diarrhoea; conjunctivitis; convulsion and tremors and poor fertility. As mentioned earlier not all birds with chlamydia show signs of having the disease. Many birds are asymptomatic carriers. They will often only show clinical signs if stressed (new surroundings, moulting or breeding). So even if your bird is showing no signs now chlamydia may still be a problem in the future.

If you are concerned about chlamydiosis you can have your birds tested. However it is hard to conclusively identify this bacteria. Helpful hints are the clinical signs, antigen tests (such as PCR), antibody tests (such as immunocomb tests) and cytology of the conjunctiva and blood cells. These are available at your avian veterinarian. Fortunately if your birds are found to have chlamydia there is available treatment. Doxycycline is the preferred treatments for Chlamydiosis. The treatment is for 45 days. The medication is available as an in water medication or preferably by weekly injection. Additional treatment procedures may be needed if your bird is sick and infected with chlamydia. The cage should be cleaned thoroughly daily and then disinfected with tertiary amines. Quarantine any new birds that enter your house until they have been treated for chlamydia. High energy soft-liquid food supplements for sick birds and fluids intravenously or subcutaneously may be needed in cases of severe vomiting. Treatment is often also needed for secondary infections.

Preventative measures are definitely better than treatment after your birds' are infected. At your bird's yearly health check it should be examined for any signs of chlamydia or any suggestion of exposure to chlamydia and then if necessary tested or treated for chlamydia. Preferably all new birds should be tested/treated for chlamydia by your avian veterinarian. In your case you need to have your Alexandrine checked over by your avian veterinarian and tested for chlamydia if your veterinarian deems it necessary, even if it is showing no signs of chlamydia at present.



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Chlamydiosis is a common concern for our bird clients at our bird and exotic clinic. Chlamydiosis is also called psittacosis, parrot fever or more technically called chlamydophilosis (to distinguish it from the human disease chlamydia).

So what is Chlamydiosis? Chlamydiosis is a disease caused by an intracellular bacteria called chlamydia psittaci. It is seen in all species of birds and is very common in most parrot species (especially cockatiels and princess parrots) and also pigeons. Since both the birds you mentioned are Alexandrian parrots they can both definitely carry or become infected with chlamydia.

Avian (bird) chlamydia does affect humans as well as birds. The common signs are flu-like symptoms with a high fever, severe headaches and often a dry cough. If left untreated in humans it can develop into atypical pneumonia and meningitis. It is important to realise that even birds without clinical signs can pass chlamydia to humans. Not all people show signs of chlamydia and not all people who come into contact with birds