

Acepromazine (ACP) for Anxiety and Phobias – A welfare problem?

ACP may be used as a sedative and can often be used as a form of restraint when handling pets and is routinely used within veterinary procedures. However not all vets use ACP, so it is worth asking your vet and expressing your concerns.

Sedative drugs such as acepromazine (ACP) cause sedation, but do not produce any anxiolytic effects. This means that a dog treated with a sedative drug would be immobilised and appear calm, yet in reality they are still aware of their environment and current situation but are unable to move. Therefore they can still form emotional responses to a stressor (especially associated with sound) and given the power of classical conditioning this may lead very quickly to a phobic response.

Because of the nature of such drugs, the intensity of the emotional impact from a stressor may actually increase, as the dog is aware of the situation but unable to react in a manner to reduce its anxiety. This will negatively impact on any previous existing anxieties or phobias, possibly undoing previous corrective action and creating negative associations for future interactions with the stimulus.

The reliability of sedative drugs when administered orally is not consistent and, as such, high doses of the drug may be required. Using high doses however, can cause systemic effects such as hypervolemia (increased blood-fluid volume), hyperexcitability and extrapyramidal side effects such as akinesia (an inability to move) or akathisia (an inability to remain still).

Because of the associated problems with sedative drug use, they are no longer recommended for use in treatment of phobias or anxiety (Neilson JC, 2002; Casey R, 2002) and at Dean Hart 2015, we do not work with this form of sedative. We will not accept pets in for grooming or rehabilitation where the vet has prescribed use of ACP and can help work towards the use of more welfare orientated products.

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