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Four seasons in an animal rescue centre; classical music reduces environmental stress in kennelled dogs

Companion Animal Research Review Issue 1 with Nick Cave

Authors: Bowman, A. et al.

Summary: This cross-over study examined physiological and psychological changes in dogs exposed to long-term (7 days) of classical music or silence in a kennel environment assessed by measurement of heart rate variability, salivary cortisol and behaviour. Changes in heart rate variability and behavioural data suggesting reduced stress levels occurred in dogs in both groups during auditory stimulation with classical music. Behavioural data showed that both groups spent more time sitting/lying and silent and less time standing and barking during auditory stimulation. A General Regression Analysis of changes in heart rate variability parameters suggest that male dogs responded better to auditory stimulation than female dogs.

Comment: Stress in hospitalised animals is almost inevitable, but external factors can increase or decrease it. A stressed animal eats and drinks less, and there can be measurable effects on immunity, healing and ultimately recovery. Several simple, economical manipulations of

the kennel and cattery environment are available including avoidance of stressful noise, separation of species, provision of toys, grooming, familiar bedding, and the use of aerosolised pheromones. Previous studies have shown that short-term exposure to classical music can increase time sleeping and decrease barking in healthy kennelled dogs. This study, however, is a comprehensive evaluation of the effects of classical music in a rescue shelter, where the authors assessed heart rate variability, behavioural responses and salivary cortisol as the main measures. Again, a positive response in all parameters except salivary cortisol was seen, though the dogs appeared to habituate to the music within a few days. Whether the habituation was to the effect of classical music, or a habituation specifically to the repeated music that could be abrogated with variety, is under investigation. For veterinary clinics, however, the provision of a little Mozart in the wards, might be more than simply music to the ears.

Reference: *Physiol Behav.* 2015;143:70-82

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