



Car Travel with your dog

Car travel is an important part of life for many dogs as it can lead to them exploring different areas and travelling further afield! But it can also lead to them visiting the vet – which might not be so much fun! We need to make sure our furry friends are happy and confident travelling in the car regardless of where they might be going and give them the smoothest ride possible!

Safety first!

When in a vehicle, make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so that they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. A seat belt harness, pet carrier, dog cage or dog guard are ways of restraining animals in cars.

If you are using a seat belt harness, make sure your dog is neither behind the driver nor able to reach them.

Dogs shouldn't be allowed to hang their heads out of the window as this could be dangerous for them and distracting for the driver and other road users.

Crates, pet carriers and fitted guards must be securely fixed in place so that there is no risk of slipping, and your dog should be able to stand up, turn around and lie down within these secure areas for comfort. Thick blankets or a duvet as bedding can help to absorb vibrations during travelling.

If you are travelling with more than one dog ideally separate them so that each can have their own space.

Hot temperatures inside cars very quickly become fatal, even if it seems cool outside. Measures such as parking in the shade or rolling down windows can't make it safe, so never leave your dog alone in the car and keep him as cool as possible when travelling. Planning journeys at cooler times of the day, using sun blinds and air conditioning or opening windows a little en route can allow a cool breeze to circulate and make the journey much more pleasant and comfortable, for everyone.

Dogs aren't able to cool down as effectively as people, so might be at greater risk of heat stroke and dehydration. Keep a supply of water in the car – non-slip/non-spill travel water bowls can be very useful - and plan where to take regular breaks for toileting, exercise and replenishing water.

To reduce the risk of travel sickness, make sure your dog has their last meal before the journey at least 2 hours before travelling. If your dog regularly suffers from travel sickness contact your vet for advice.

Older dogs, larger dogs or those less mobile might benefit from a ramp to help them get in and out of the car. Introduce this completely flat on the ground first, using treats to reward your dog for walking over it so their paws can get used to how it feels. Then find something solid and unmoving to prop it up on at a lower height than your car and again give them treats for walking up it – you could lay a trail of treats along it for your dog to follow and eat. This gets your dog used to walking upwards and being slightly higher than the ground – which is an unusual experience for them – before you then place it right up to your car. Always make it positive and fun using tasty treats or rewards your dog really likes.

Dogs don't know what cars are!

Until they've got used to car journeys, dogs may not understand what is happening! They might also find it confusing, worrying or frustrating when they can see people, other dogs or traffic through the car windows and some dogs might bark at what they can see through the window. Some dogs might feel vulnerable and exposed while others might be frustrated because they can't get out to join in with what's happening outside. Others might feel they need to protect the car because it is valuable to them or is full of things that are valuable – such as the dog's human family, their toys or blanket for example. If your dog is struggling then ask for professional help.

Use treats to reward your dog for simply being in the car, as some dogs can be worried or excited about what might happen when they're in a small, confined space and find it difficult to relax. If they get treats every time they get in the car they'll soon really like it in there!

Remember that your dog needs to get used to the sound and movement of the car so it's useful to always give them something lovely when anything is changing in their environment, so when the car starts up make sure that your dog gets a tasty treat, and then when the car starts moving again give them some treats. They'll soon learn that it's nothing to worry about as it means good things happen!

Getting in and out calmly and safely!

Ensuring your dog is calm and paying attention to you before they get in or out of the car is really important. If your dog is allowed to jump right in every journey you make that might be okay when it's just you and your dog but if you're ever giving anyone a lift or needing to pack the car with baggage, then your dog could interfere with this by leaping in and then become confused or frustrated when they can't just jump right in! Make sure you have something your dog likes with you – their favourite treats should work well – and reward them for sitting calmly before you're ready to open the car door and invite them in. Keep them sitting while you slowly open the door by giving them a few more treats, as long as they remain the sitting position. If you do this every time

they get into the car they'll soon learn that sitting quietly is what results in them being able to get inside and should start to do this naturally when they reach the car!

Letting your dog straight out of the car every time they reach home, or the park, will put them at risk of expecting to do this every time you stop, and that might be very dangerous indeed. When removing your dog from the car always ensure that it is safe to do so first, ideally teaching them to wait for you to ensure their lead is safely attached and then to invite them out under your guidance and control.

Teach your dog to get out of the car calmly and quietly by having some of their favourite treats, opening the door slowly and just a little way, and waiting for your dog to sit or to stay still while you continue to open the door, then rewarding them and making sure you are holding their leads before you invite them to get out (or lift them out).

ON the road!

Start with short, slow and gentle, familiar journeys that will allow your dog to get used to car travel in a positive way. Build up to longer journeys gradually and only when your dog appears relaxed within the car.

Drive smoothly allowing plenty of time for breaking, as a jerky or uncomfortable journey might make your dog less willing to travel next time!

Frightened dogs might need a little more time and help!

If your dog is showing signs of being frightened about travelling in the car never force them to travel, as this is only going to make them even more worried and they might feel trapped and panic. Either find someone to stay with them if you need to travel or avoid the journey/make alternative travel plans if possible. Avoid car journeys completely while you seek the guidance of an experienced behaviourist.

**Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs.
If you need help for your Dogs Trust Dog please email: reception@dogstrust.ie**

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