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## A Scent to De-Stress Pets

By LAURA JOHANNES

*If Fido is stressed out, maybe he just needs a whiff of pheromones. A growing array of **animal pheromone products**—which contain substances the animal perceives as calming—can improve pet behavior, say the companies that sell them. Veterinarians say one company's products is backed by extensive scientific evidence, but other brands need more research.*

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Pheromones are chemical compounds sensed in cats and dogs by the vomeronasal organ in the back of the nose. Animals use pheromones for communication. Now a growing number of companies are seeking to harness pheromones' power to help humans curb behavior problems in pets.

You can buy calming animal pheromones in spray form, intended to be used on problem areas such as sofas where a cat is marking its territory, or as diffusers, which are plugged into an electrical socket to cover a wide area. In recent years, collars that release pheromones over a monthlong period have become available.

Veterinarians say that pheromones do work—but not all the time. "They work on some animals, and not others," says veterinarian Bonnie Beaver, executive director of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists in College Station, Texas. "They work in some situations but not in others."

In cats, pheromones work well to calm the animals on trips and when introducing them to a new environment, as well as reducing scratching of furniture, says animal behaviorist Gary Landsberg, of Thornhill, Ontario. In many cats, pheromone therapy can reduce, or even eliminate, territorial urine marking on vertical surfaces. But it is generally ineffective in combatting urination on beds and other horizontal surfaces, which is most often caused not by overall stress, but by a cat's unhappiness with the location or size of its litter box or the litter used, he says.

Overall, pheromone therapy appears to be less effective than drug therapies, such as antidepressants, typically used on pets with behavior problems, Dr. Landsberg says. But he recommends trying pheromones first, since they are easier to administer and have no side effects.

The most-studied cat product is Feliway, a synthetic F3 facial pheromone, which cats deposit on surfaces when they rub them with their cheeks. To the cat, it signifies a location is safe and known, according to Libourne, France, manufacturer Ceva Santé Animale.

Feliway—backed by 13 studies published in scientific journals or presented at meetings—is

available through veterinarians, or through pet stores under the Comfort Zone brand. A 75-milliliter spray bottle (good for about 500 sprays) has a suggested retail price of \$38. Diffusers with enough pheromone product to last a month sell for a suggested price of about \$50, with refills for \$28.

For dogs, the most-researched product is DAP, or Dog Appeasing Pheromone, a synthetic version of a substance made by mother dogs to calm puppies. Also from Ceva and sold in stores as Comfort Zone, the product is backed by 16 published or presented studies. It's available as a spray, diffuser or, from your vet as a collar for \$33 to \$37, depending on the size.

In dogs, pheromones seem to work best when used in conjunction with training, scientists say. In a study of 45 puppies in two-month training classes, the animals wearing the collars were "better socialized and adapted faster" to new situations, according to a Ceva-funded study published in December, in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association. DAP is recommended to help dogs adjust to strangers and new environments, and to reduce fear from noises, such as thunderstorms.

This spring and summer, Sergeant's Pet Care Products Inc., of Omaha, Neb., came out with Good Behavior collars for cats and dogs, which sell for \$14.99 and last a month. The product packaging says the collars are "calming" and include "pheromones." But while Ceva describes in detail the pheromones in its products, Sergeant won't say exactly what its products contain. That information is "proprietary," a spokeswoman says. The company has three studies, so far unpublished, which it says confirm the products' efficacy.

Beware of products labeled "calming spray" and containing aromas, such as lavender, which may be soothing but are backed by scant research.

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