

IS IT MORE STRESSFUL FOR DOGS TO BE EXAMINED ON THE TABLE VERSUS THE FLOOR? A RANDOMIZED CROSSOVER STUDY

P. Mercier^{1*}, C. Wilson², I Bazin³, S. Fiset⁴, K. Seksel⁵

¹Riverview Animal Hospital, Riverview, NB, CA

²Philibert Wilson Veterinary Professional Corporation, Ottawa, ON, CA

³Centre Vétérinaire Daubigny, Québec, QC, CA

⁴Université de Moncton, Campus Edmundston, Edmundston, NB, CA

⁵University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, AU

*Corresponding author: pierrette.mercier@riverviewah.ca

Abstract

Veterinary examinations can be very stressful for some dogs. It is reported that 78% of dogs show fearful behaviour on the table and 70% of dogs were reluctant to enter the veterinary clinic/hospital. Most dogs are more fearful on the examination table than the floor. Because of this, it is recommended to examine the dog on the floor to help minimize stress; but, are most dogs more comfortable on the floor than the table? This has never been validated. The goal of this study was to evaluate the stress levels of family-owned dogs *Canis familiaris*, (N=37) when examined on the table versus the floor. The dogs underwent a standardized physical examination on the floor or the table and examined again after a two-week washout period on the opposite surface. Body stress scores and physiological parameters were compared as an indicative of stress during the examinations; the dogs served as their own control. Two veterinary behaviour specialists blinded to the goal of the study evaluated each dog's body language during the examination. Result showed no significant difference in body language, heart rate and respiratory rate but the temperature of male dogs were significantly higher when examined on the table versus the floor (M: 38.8°C vs. 37.7°C; $p = 0.01$). The dogs' previous experience in a veterinary hospital also made a difference in stress levels. The main conclusion of this study is to examine the pet where it is most comfortable with the least amount of stress.

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