

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Imagine if any behavior challenge you had with your dog, I could give you a pill and boom, it would go away. I used to teach seminars and people would say, "What can I do for this?" like I had some magic pixie dust that you'd sprinkle it on your dog's food and then boom, that would go away. How amazing would that be?

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But today, I'm going to share with you how, in some cases, there actually is a pill that could make things go away. True story. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And if you're watching this on YouTube, go ahead and hit the like button right now. And if you're not a subscriber to this channel, why not? Come on, it's a great channel. Go ahead, hit the subscribe button and the little bell that keeps you notified whenever I put up a new video.

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So back in the mid nineties, I was at an agility trial with my Border Collie at the time, Stoni. And I could do a whole podcast on how awesome Stoni was. She was just gifted athletically. She was the best at everything she ever tried. It was just a joy to have as a dog. And she was very sweet. Actually, my puppy This! reminds me a lot of Stoni. I believe that Stoni, who was born in 1990, I keep saying, I think This! might be Stoni who's come back to me, because they're the same sweet dog.

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I was at an agility trial and Stoni at the time, would have been maybe six or seven years old. I can still remember this incident. I was just warming her up to go in the ring. I was walking her, so I wasn't really even deep into my warm-up. I was just walking her along the hill, away from the ring and one woman went by with a puppy on a leash, minding her own business, and Stoni on a leash, and normally Stoni didn't even notice dogs.

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All of a sudden, she turned and sounded like a saber tooth tiger as she lunged at this little puppy. We didn't get anywhere near her, scared the living bejeebers out of the lady who owned the puppy, and scared me. Because in all of my lifetime of owning her, I'd never known her to do that. And I thought, Holy smokes, are you possessed by the devil himself? What has gone on here?

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And later that day, in that evening, I was sharing that bizarre incident to a friend of mine. And she said, "Have you ever heard of [Jean Dodds](#)?" And at the time I think I'd kind of heard the name. Well Jean, a fellow Canadian, a very famous Veterinarian who really has done a lot of great things in the name of helping dogs and really get to the bottom of how we can keep our dogs at their healthiest. And she said, "you should contact Jean Dodds and explain to her what happened."

And so, the next Monday, I actually phoned Jean and she picked up the phone and I was like, oh my gosh, I am star struck. Because by then I'd done a lot of research on the woman and realized what an awesome human being she was.



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And so, she told me that sudden onset fear, aggression or anxiety quite often, can be a sign of thyroid deficiency or thyroid malfunction. And she said, go and get your dog's blood tested, but be very specific. You don't want the clinic to just take an in house test for T4.

You want a complete thyroid panel.

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She was very specific. A complete thyroid panel with T4 circulating T4, T3, and TGAA.

And she went on to say, "if your dog rates below normal, or even if your dog is rating on the low normal, you may want to consider, especially if you see these sort of incidents happening again, you may want to consider putting her on the lower side dose for thyroid meds and see if the behavior changes".

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Well, lo and behold, I did see that behavior. She was unpredictable around the dogs in the house the next week. And so, I'd gone to the Veterinarian, we got the blood profile back. She was normal, but on the very low end of normal, we put her on thyroids, and boom, everything went away.

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That little incident stuck in the back of my mind. And two more times with my own dogs, it has come up and I've taken my dogs profiles, in each case behavior changes happen.

So Decaff, when she was about seven years old, she became suddenly terrified of thunder. And I remember leading up to that she would be kind of shaking, at different times, which wasn't normal for her.

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I wish I had remembered what Jean said, because I didn't think of thunder, I was thinking aggression. But at the time Dr. Dodds did say to me, sudden onset fear, aggression, or anxiety. Now, if you go to [Dr. Dodds' website](#) and I'll put a link here in the show notes, she has a [laundry list](#) of things that might already be affecting your dog.

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It took me probably nine months before I put two and two together and went, "Wait a minute. This weird behavior around thunder, maybe I should get her thyroid checked." And sure enough, Decaff's thyroid was low, I put her on thyroid meds. It didn't happen as quickly as Stoni.

And here is my theory on that. Because the behavior of being afraid of thunder was allowed to be repeated for almost a year before we put her on the meds, it would have taken her longer to have changed the behavior.

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And with Stoni, it was within a week or two that she was put on thyroid meds and her behavior changed instantly. With Decaff, it did go away, but it took probably close to a year before I saw a behavior change.

And the last one was my dog Buzz, when he was close to being a teenager. And he had a geriatric vestibular disorder. The same thing, tested his thyroid.



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And I had another dog with a geriatric vestibular disorder. I'm not going to go into details of what that looks like. You can Google it. So, I had his thyroid done. Now, typically this sort of episode could last for a week or longer, and it might come back and sometimes a dog is left with permanent head tilt when they go through this geriatric vestibular disorder. But Buzzy, his thyroid was very low, put him on meds, he came out of it within 24 hours, had no permanent signs and it never came back again.

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You might go, "Well, this is bizarre. Behavior problems and you can fix with a pill?" That's exactly what I'm saying. A behavior problem that you can fix with a pill. Now for me, I have seen this in many dogs over the decades of me teaching.

When I see people that tell me, "My dog suddenly is afraid. He used to tug in any environment. And now he's looking around when I asked them to tug". Thyroid. Complete panel, is really important.

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They have to send that panel out because they can't just in-home test. Maybe in-home veterinary tests have changed. A lot of Veterinarians may not be aware of the connection between thyroid and behavior. Now there's a lot of Veterinarians who've been around the block and they've seen a lot of things in their experience, and they'll be able to pick this up right away, but you know, some might not be aware of this.

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And so, think about hormones, like, have you heard of roid rage. Now it's definitely a different kind of hormone, but hormones have effect on behavior. The people who decide to pump all the steroids into their body to get faster or stronger, for performance events. Yeah, they definitely are a little bit angry.

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And if you look at menopause, as I approach my 60th year on this planet, that 70% of people who experienced any kind of symptoms of menopause say irritability is their number one symptom and depression, rage, and anger, are high up there with it.

So, my point is, behavior isn't always a choice. Behavior is chemical. It absolutely is chemically influenced.

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And with dogs, the number one endocrine problem is related to the thyroid. When I say endocrine, that is, glands that produce hormones in the body.

The number one problem with dogs would be thyroid problems. That's the most common.

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Now, Tufts University has been doing this ongoing study, looking at behavior abnormalities and testing those dogs for a thyroid panel. And if you look at Dr. Dodds' website, you'll find [this study](#) and at the time there was 634 dogs that they had tested. And I think that's up to 1,500 dogs now.

Of the 634 dogs, they broke them into "is your dog's behavior challenge?". And it was aggression that was by far the number one behavior challenge. Seizuring was number two. Fearfulness was number three, and hyperactivity was number four.



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And when they tested these dogs, of the dogs showing aggression, 62% of them had below normal levels, or acceptable range levels, of circulating thyroid hormone. That of the seizing dogs, 77% had a thyroid problem. And 47%, almost 50% of the fearful dogs had a problem, I think it was a third of all the hyperactive dogs.

So, my point is, I saw it with my dogs, in the age range of I believe 6 to 13 years of age. However, as soon as your dog goes through puberty, I mean, they could see this in puppies. Puppies that have aggression towards people or aggression towards other dogs.

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It could be that they have a thyroid problem. And so, you want to make sure that you check into this. Now in that study, that Tufts University was looking at, not all of the cases immediately got better when they were put on thyroid support. And again, my hallucination as to why that may happen is behavior could be stimulated by hormones, but it could also then [become a trigger](#) by something.

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So, if for example, the dogs were suddenly [aggressive](#) and then that aggression caused them to be getting in trouble by their owners and that created more stress and [anxiety](#), that it may take longer.

Just like Decaff took longer for her to get over her fear of thunder, even though she was on supportive thyroid. It did eventually get better, but it wasn't overnight the way it was for Stoni and Buzz.

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And I think it's because I picked it up on Stoni and Buzz so much sooner. That's just a complete theory on my part, but I am presenting really good solid science here.

You know, this podcast is about dog training but more importantly, it's about behavior. And I really wanted to talk about this topic because you may never see it with your own dogs.

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And depending on the breed, like there are some breeds that are more susceptible, like Golden Retrievers or Sighthounds. In my case it was two Border Collies, completely unrelated like not even common dogs in 10 generations in the pedigree. And in Decaff, who was a Jack Russell and one quarter Border Collie and that one quarter border Collie that was in her, wasn't related to either Stoni or Buzz. So, it could be breed-specific. But it could happen in any breed.

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And I just wanted you to know, even if it isn't your dog that may have this problem, if you hear of somebody saying, "Wow, my dog was always such a nice dog. And then boom, it's like he had a brain tumor or something. He suddenly just became aggressive towards other dogs, or aggressive towards people, or suddenly he became really fearful of things and started shaking". there's as I said, a list of symptoms that your dog may show, but those were the four groups of the most common ones when they've really been looking at this.

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So, I thought that was super important for you to know. Behavior sometimes isn't as simple as a dog choosing something you would rather they not do, but isn't it awesome to know that behavior can be influenced by just giving your dog daily doses of hormones to balance them out?





Episode: #81

Sudden Aggression and Your Dog's Thyroid

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That's it for today on Shaped by Dog, please leave me a comment. Let me know, and tuck this one back in your memory bank. Bring that out whenever you are triggered by somebody saying, "Well, my dog is being weird all of a sudden." You're going to be able to help them. See you next time.

Resources:

[Dr. Jean Dodds's Website \(Hemopet\)](#)

[Thyroid Articles by Dr. Jean Dodds](#)

[TUFTS Reference: Behavioral Changes Associated With Thyroid Dysfunction In Dogs by W. Jean Dodds DVM \(W. Jean Dodds, DVM and Linda P. Aronson, DVM\)](#)

[Video Blog: Understanding Your Dog's Triggers](#)

[Podcast Episode 29: Understanding and Preventing Reactivity and Aggression in Your Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 79: Reduce Anxiety and Grow Your Dog's Confidence with These Pro Dog Training Tips](#)



Sudden Aggression and Your Dog's Thyroid

About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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