



FEAR OF NOISES

Thunderstorms and Fireworks

Fear of noises (such as thunderstorms and fireworks) is a common problem in dogs. Some dogs react with a mild fear response of panting and pacing; others get extremely agitated and may become destructive or panicked. A *phobia* exists where the fear is intense and produces an extreme reaction.

Noise Phobia can be treated

These pets are usually at risk of harming themselves or property when faced with a thunderstorm or fireworks display, especially if their owners are not home. Treatment is thus very important, not only to reduce the anxiety for your pet, but also to avoid injury and property damage. Well-meaning owners often try to calm their pet down - but giving a dog attention or affection in this situation effectively rewards and reinforces the bad behaviour and makes it more likely to happen again.

There are 3 main parts to the treatment of noise phobia:

1) Consultation with a veterinarian or a behavioural specialist.

The problem needs to be properly diagnosed and treated. Some of these pets may also have other anxieties or behavioural problems, and these may need to be dealt with at the same time. Your veterinarian can dispense drugs if required, and describe the proper management of the problem.

2) Reduce fear during the event

Drug therapy may be needed at times to prevent injury and destruction. This is especially the case if the dog will be left alone during a thunderstorm or fireworks. The drugs used are prescription drugs and can be dispensed only after a behavioural consultation with a veterinarian.

Other things that may help during a storm or fireworks display include:

- Do everything you can to ensure that your yard is secure against a determined attempt to break out.
- Make sure your pets have identification (microchips, collars and tags) in case of escape.
- If possible, bring your pet inside before the storm or fireworks begin. Once they've started it may be too late. Very small dogs can be confined in a crate, and larger pets should be locked in a small room (eg. laundry). Ideally the room should be a secure place for your dog, with a familiar comfortable bed. A relatively soundproof (well-insulated) room is ideal - one that she can't get out of and where she can't hurt herself or damage your house.
- Close the blinds and turn the lights on so that your dog can't see the flash of the lightning or fireworks.
- Turn on the television or radio to disguise some of the sound of the thunder or fireworks.
- Provide a bone, rawhide or chew toy - but remember that some pets will be too stressed to eat. If your dog has a favourite toy, give them that too.
- Don't make too much of a fuss WHILE they are showing fear. Ignore the storm/fireworks and act as if they are an everyday event. Patting your pet and using a soothing tone of voice may seem like the right thing to do. But it may just reinforce the bad behaviour and make things worse next time!

3) Desensitisation and Counter-conditioning

This is the key to long-term effective treatment of noise phobia. It involves reducing your dog's sensitivity to the noise (*desensitisation*) and replacing the unwanted behaviour with a more desirable one (*counter-conditioning*). You can do most of it at home and your dog will probably enjoy it. It's not expensive either, but it does take time to achieve results. We can show you how to do this. Just make an appointment for a behavioural consultation.

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