

## Noise Phobias

A 2005 survey for the RSPCA found that nearly half of UK dogs were found to exhibit some degree of fear of firework, thunder or gunshot noises. A more recent study classified around a third of these fearful dogs as severely affected, reacting to fireworks, thunder and other noise events that were almost inaudible to their owners.

If you are unsure if your dog is affected, you can take a short 'sound sensitivity questionnaire'. This can be found online via our website – [calwetonvets.com](http://calwetonvets.com) – on the Useful Links page (located in the Pets dropdown menu).

### Prevention

Prevention of noise phobia is best achieved early, by exposing puppies to loud noises in a controlled environment. This is readily achieved with the use of a sound-based treatment programme developed by Behaviour Specialist Vets. These can be downloaded for free online, via our Pets Useful Links page as detailed above. This can also be used for older dogs, with improvements seen after 8 weeks. It is likely to take longer for severely affected dogs.

Prevention takes time and preparation, and whilst it may not be too late for *next year's* Fireworks season, management and medication can provide respite for your dog in the more immediate term.

### Management

It is important not to force animals to 'confront their fears'. In addition, comforting a fearful dog excessively should be avoided as this can result in them becoming over-dependent. The best way to reduce stress and fear is to provide a secure hiding place that can be accessed at any time.



Your dog may already have a specific hiding place, for example behind a sofa, and the best option is to make this existing place even better. In general it should be dark and quiet, away from household activity but possibly close a person for added security.

Other ideas for creating a suitable place include those shown overleaf.

Tips for creating a hiding place:

- Windows and curtains should be closed, and lighting dimmed
- Familiar bed with extra blankets & some items of clothing carrying the scent of the owner
- A water bowl, chews and toys in the room
- A pheromone (D.A.P.) or herbal (Pet Remedy) diffuser close to the bed's location
- The hiding place should be available at all times

If possible the hiding place should be set up a week ahead of any expected noisy event.

Show your approval and give treats when your dog is in the hiding place, in order to ensure that they consider it a safe and 'happy' refuge.

## Medicines

Short-term management of symptoms can be aided with the use of certain medications which reduce anxiety and help your pet forget the frightening experience. This is important in helping reduce the risk that the problem becomes worse each time. Difficulty walking and hyperexcitability are possible side effects.

Each pet will respond slightly differently to the medication, some needing higher doses than others. Therefore it is a really good idea to administer a 'test dose' at a low dose to check your dog's response, on a quiet day. This will allow for any dose adjustments should the effect be insufficient or the side effects a concern.

## Cats

We don't know whether cats experience the same level of distress as dogs as a result of noisy events, though plenty choose to stay indoors. Behavioural therapy (noise desensitisation) is much harder to perform in cats, and the best way to help cats may be to keep them inside after dark, starting from a week before and throughout the firework season. They should be provided with access to food, water, a comfy bed and a litter tray.

Cats don't tend to be reassured by human contact and studies indicate that they may in fact find handling mildly stressful, even if they don't show it. It is therefore best to leave cats alone and not intervene when they are frightened.

Pheromone diffusers (e.g. Feliway) may be beneficial and should be installed 1-2 weeks ahead in order to increase a cat's sense of security. It should be located in a part of the house where the cat tends to spend a lot of time.