

Coping with firework fears in pets

- Make sure that your pet is appropriately identified in case he/she escapes during the fireworks. Dogs should have a collar and tag, as well as a microchip. Remember to keep your contact details up to date.
- Keep cats indoors during firework season.
- Try to give dogs a long and vigorous walk early in the day, and give a good meal in the evening to help them to sleep through the worst of the noise where possible.
- Keep dogs on leads in case they bolt at unexpected bangs during the day.
- Don't go for walks in the evening when fireworks are more likely to be let off.
- Make sure that pets cannot accidentally escape during displays by keeping doors, gates and cat flaps shut and locked.
- Keep the curtains closed with lights on in the evening. Play music or turn up the television to help cover bangs and flashes.
- Give your pet a secure comfort area such as a crate or box covered with a blanket to enable them to hide if they want to during the worst of the noise. Do not shut them in but allow them to use it as they wish.
- Feeling trapped may increase anxiety so don't shut your pet in a room by himself. If closing certain doors helps to reduce noise then do so, but remain with your pet.
- Distract your pet during the peak of displays – play with them, do some reward training or give chews to gnaw on.
- Massage techniques can help to keep your pet relaxed.
- If your pet comes to you for reassurance, give it briefly with a few calm words and gentle handling, but don't over-reassure. Try to keep your own behaviour and routine as normal as possible to show that there is nothing to fear.
- If your pet becomes very nervous and wants to hide under the bed or in the wardrobe let him. Don't try to make him come out if he doesn't want to.
- Don't punish your pet for nervous behaviour, which sometimes can include toileting accidents or destructive chewing and scratching. Shouting will make things worse.
- If you live in a particularly active fireworks area, think about taking your pet to a quieter location or to stay with a friend or relative. Always remember to update your pet's identity tag with the temporary address.
- Avoid setting off fireworks in your own garden. If it is unavoidable, do so as far as possible from the house. Better still, ask someone you trust to look after your dog in their home for the time the display will be going on. Remember to notify neighbours who may also have pets.
- Never take pets to an organised firework display or have them outside during your own display.
- If you have a particularly anxious pet, speak to us about treatments such as pheromones or nutraceuticals that can help. It is important that you discuss any over-the-counter treatments with your vet or vet nurse before using them.

- Severely phobic pets may require medication to help them cope with firework season. This should be discussed and arranged well ahead of time to allow health checks to be done and test doses to be given, to establish the suitability for your pet.
- Accustom young pets to noises using a well-designed behavioural program. It best to seek guidance from qualified trainers, such as an APDT member.
- We have CDs of sound effects available at the surgery, or check out these useful links and apps:
 - <http://www.zylkenepet.co.uk/sound-desensitisation.html>
 - <http://www.adaptil.com/uk/What-Causes-Stress-in-Dogs/Dogs-and-fireworks>
 - Sound Proof Puppy Training app



Advice for rabbits and other small pets

- Bring outdoor cages and hutches into a garage or shed to reduce the impact of noise and flashes from fireworks.
- Cover cages with layers of insulation material or an old duvet to muffle sounds, remembering to allow for ventilation.
- If you can't bring hutches indoors, turn them to face a wall or fence to reduce the impact of flashes of light.
- Give rabbits and small pets a small box inside their usual cage with lots of extra bedding that they can burrow and hide in.
- For house rabbits and pets, follow some of the tips given above – close windows and curtains, have music or the TV switched on if they are accustomed to it.
- Ensure that pets have been well fed during the day as many will stop eating when fearful. If prolonged, this can cause digestive disturbances in herbivores. Otherwise, keep diet and feeding routines as close to normal as possible.
- Don't offer unusual food treats in case this causes upset tummies.

