

## NOISE PHOBIAS IN DOGS

With firework season, Guy Fawkes's Night, Diwali, Christmas and New Year risking the upset of fireworks, as well as all the changes that accompany Christmas – shopping, decorations, visitors and music - it can be a frightening time for pets, with many pets being frightened of fireworks and plenty nervous of strangers at the door.

Noise fear is manifested in obvious behaviours such as toileting indoors, cowering, clinginess, barking, shaking and pacing but also by subtle cues such as yawning, lip licking and not eating. If not addressed, these mild fears can progress to severe noise phobias with severe reactions, and of course it is distressing to see your pet upset. Noise phobias are a serious welfare concern for your pet.

**Before the noise starts** - Provide a den or covered area for your pet to seek safety in. Cats often prefer to be high up. Using blankets can help to sound-proof the den. Ensure their microchip details are up-to-date in case they run away.

Start them on an anti-anxiety supplement up to a week before the anticipated event.

Feliway and Adaptil plug-ins are recommended to accompany a cosy den.

**On The Day** - Walk your dogs before it gets dark and the fireworks start, then keep all pets inside.

Ensure windows and cat-flaps are shut to keep cats safe inside.

Remember to provide a litter tray.

Bring in runs or hutches for smaller pets. If you can't, increase shelter with re-positioning and blankets as much as possible, as well as providing extra bedding or bolt holes/boxes for them to hide in.

**During the Event** - Stay inside with your pets if you can, as they will feel safer with company.

Close windows and curtains and increase TV or music noise to mask fireworks.

Don't react to the fireworks yourself.

Should you comfort your dog? For most dogs, you should not comfort them as it may reinforce their fear. However, if your pet has become used to, and reliant on, your support during fireworks, don't suddenly withdraw this. It is very important not to punish or shout at your pet(s), as this will reinforce their anxiety and fear.

### Calming Supplements

**Feliway and Adaptil diffusers, sprays and collars.**

These are synthetic copies of calming pheromones for cats and dogs that help to reassure and comfort animals in their own home to help them cope with stressful events such as fireworks. It also helps to calm cats that are being kept in due to fireworks and reduce an inter-cat tension or scratching in the house. The diffusers should be plugged in a few days before and left on throughout the season, each diffuser typically lasting a month. Collars are available for dogs, and sprays for both dogs and cats, to use on furniture or dens and carriers to help calm them.

**Zylkene** is a natural protein product derived from milk that helps to calm cats and dogs, supporting them to cope

with stressful situations. It can be used in all pets as it has no side effects, is hypoallergenic, contains no lactose and does not interact with prescription medications. It is an easy to give powder for once daily dosing in food or liquid, started a few (3-7) days before and continued throughout the firework season.

**Calmex** is a fast acting blend of amino acids, plant extracts and B-vitamins that comes in capsules that can be given whole or sprinkled onto food. It is designed to help in short-term stressful situations and gets to work straight away to promote relaxed behaviour in dogs and cats. A dose should be given shortly before dark falls, eg mid afternoon, and can be repeated a few hours later, giving no more than 2 doses every 12 hours.

### Medication

Prescription medications are extremely useful for some of our patients. Any medication can only be prescribed after a consultation with a vet to discuss what is the most appropriate option, a health check to ensure as much as possible the safety and efficacy of the medication, and to discuss how else you can help you pet(s). It is important to be aware that a noise phobia is extremely distressing to our pets, and medication can help to manage this in the short term as well as the long term (see below).

If you feel your pet will need that extra level of help during the firework season please arrange an appointment at the practice in good time.

### Tackling Noise Phobia

If your pet has an extreme reaction to noise and panics very quickly this is an excessive response called a noise phobia. This is a severe behavioural problem with a significant effect on your pet's welfare. Prescription medication may be required to help your pet cope with the fireworks season, but the other measures above should also be employed and not neglected.

It is important to tackle noise phobia in the long term with a programme of desensitisation training alongside calming supplements and/or medications. If your pet has a fearful response to loud noises then please arrange an appointment to discuss this, so we can put a plan in place prior to next year.