



Dogs, thunderstorms and fireworks: the fear is real

LOUD SOUNDS RELEASE ADRENALINE & STRESS HORMONES IN DOGS

PET PHOBIAS

A phobia is an excessive or persistent fear of a specific stimulus or situation. Any animal can develop a phobia to almost any situation or stimulus. In dogs, the most common phobias relate to thunderstorms and loud noises.

Dogs with noise phobias show symptoms including panting, pacing and hiding. They are often so frightened they try and escape and can sustain injury in the process. Because of this, fearful dogs can be a danger to themselves.

Dr Jenni Green, University Veterinary Teaching Hospital Camden Veterinary Director and Small Animal Veterinarian explains: "Dogs that exhibit thunderstorm or noise phobias have very intense symptoms. These can include panting, pacing, whining, drooling, hiding, and destroying things around the house.

"They're often so frightened they will try and escape. Many dogs go missing during storms or fireworks. They often go through windows and doors and sustain injuries in the process.

"Dogs with noise phobias appear to chain events together and, over time, start to show signs of fear even before a storm. It can get to the point where they are fearful just from rain. We call this 'generalising'."

Since we know noise and storm phobias often go hand in hand with other anxiety conditions, there's good reason to seek veterinary advice for pets appearing to suffer during noise events. With forward planning, your veterinarian may be able to prescribe treatment.

"Medication can reduce the level of fear and anxiety in order to allow other storm or noise phobia treatment methods to work, such as the use of thunder shirts or safe zones," says Dr Green.

Thunder shirts apply a gentle and constant pressure on the pet's torso. Using pressure to relieve anxiety is a common practice. The pressure works in a similar manner to swaddling an infant.

A safe zone is an area pets can access during storms or fearful situations. You can enhance safe zones by adding sound proofing, a white noise machine and a comfy bed. It's ideal to make sure that they always have access to this area, even when you're not home.



Your dog will often choose their own safe zone but it might be a bathroom, interior closets, or under or behind furniture.

In a recent study, almost 75 percent of pets were frightened of fireworks. Only 30 percent of owners sought help for their frightened pet.

"The message we need to get out there is that vets can help," says Dr Green. "There are lots of treatment options that can be considered. No one wants their pet to be terrified, or worse, get lost or injured because they are scared."

Dr Jenni Green, University Veterinary Teaching Hospital Camden Veterinary Director & Small Animal Veterinarian

