



## Does your pet suffer from thunderstorm/firework anxiety?

Here are a few things you can try:

- For many frightened pets, just staying in a crate (as long as they are used to one) or in a “safe” room with a closed door is all that is needed.
- Synthetic pheromone sprays such as Feliway for cats and Adaptil (formerly called D.A.P.) for dogs are available. These sprays imitate the properties of the natural pheromones of the lactating female that gives kittens or puppies a sense of well-being.
- An herbal relaxant called Composure is available for both dogs (chews or liquid) and cats (chews).
- Some pets respond to pressure wraps, such as Thundershirts or Anxiety Wraps. The pressure on the body may have a calming effect.
- Ear muffs to muffle sound may be tried.
- Calming caps cover a pet’s eyes to reduce visual stimulation.
- Planning ahead for these summer events is helpful. Veterinary behaviorists often recommend behavior modification, classical counter conditioning, and teaching a desirable coping response.
  - In *behavior modification*, controlling the intensity of the fireworks is necessary and often the most challenging part. While it often isn’t possible to expose a fearful dog to only “little fireworks,” controlling other factors can help. Distance from the fireworks can be less intimidating, as would be keeping the dog indoors. Music may disguise the bursts of noise; consider loud music with a regular beat.
  - *Classical counter conditioning* can create a positive association with fireworks if the anxiety isn’t extreme. Give high-value food rewards (e.g., canned food or peanut butter), offer your pet favorite toys or food puzzle toys, or have your pet practice his tricks with you. The goal is for them to learn that fireworks result in highly pleasant rewards.
  - You can teach a *desirable coping response*. The appropriate response for a dog facing something frightening is to retreat to a safe place until the frightening event ends. Providing a safe retreat, such as a crate or a closet, will give security and confidence, although selecting the location is up to the pet. Blankets to muffle the sound and a pheromone diffuser will provide natural motivation for the dog to seek this location. Being able to cope when the world becomes overwhelming is a life skill essential for both people and dogs! Hiding is not a sign of a problem, if the pet quickly returns to a normal behavior when the stress-inducing events are over.