



Did you know dogs have a heightened sense of hearing and most will respond to loud and sudden sounds with fear? The unexpected clap of thunder and boom of fireworks will upset many pets, but for some, their reaction is completely out of proportion, and they can be extremely difficult to calm down and manage.

If your dog is excessively afraid of sudden noises, then he or she may be suffering from noise phobia. But don't worry! There are methods to make the whole experience more bearable both for you, and your dog.

We are here to help!

Located around the corner from the Shelter, our Frank Samways Veterinary Clinic can offer you specialised advice and care on how to manage your dog's noise phobia.

Visit the clinic at 1 Boundary Road, North Melbourne or call (03) 9329 2755.

WHAT IS A NOISE PHOBIA?

Common to dogs, noise phobia simply means an unnatural and excessive fear of loud and sudden noise, typically fireworks and storms. Dogs with noise phobia can exhibit mild signs such as not wanting to leave your side, panting and yawning, right through to more serious signs, such as destroying furniture, digging under fences, chewing door-frames and breaking down doors.

WHY DOES MY DOG HAVE A NOISE PHOBIA?

Having a phobia is no fun for your dog and can be very distressing for you too. Typically, phobias get worse with time and they will not fix themselves unless something is done about it.

Some breeds of dogs are more 'highly strung' than others and are genetically predisposed to noise phobia. Some dogs may have however, developed a learned response to a bad experience that has progressed into a phobia.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

It is important to understand that managing and treating noise phobia can take time and patience. There are however, a few immediate actions you can take to prevent your dog from fleeing your home, getting injured and/or becoming lost.

- Identify your pet with a microchip, collar tag and/or council tag.
- Keep your contact details updated on their identification.
- Include a mobile number on your pet's collar tag.
- Check your backyard for loose fencing, gates, holes and/or any hazards that could cause injury to your pet.
- Learn what you need to do in the event of losing your pet.

MEDICAL TREATMENT

It is advised you speak to your vet if you are concerned your pet has a phobia or is highly anxious.

Useful resources and phone numbers:

- Fireworks, Storms and Your Pet Factsheet – dogshome.com/storms_fireworks
- The Lost Dogs' Home North Melbourne Shelter or Frank Samways Veterinary Clinic on (03) 9329 2755
- Bureau of Meteorology weather warnings and updates – bom.vic.gov.au
- Contact your council for the times of scheduled council fireworks in your neighbourhood.

Your vet may offer medications to help keep your pet calm. These must be given prior to a storm or fireworks. It's a good idea to trial the dose and the effect it has on your dog well before he/she actually needs it in order to find the most appropriate dose rate for your dog.

Always consult your vet about any issue or concerns you may have about medicating your pet.

DESENSITISATION THERAPY

Rather than needing to anticipate every storm and fireworks, and giving your dog calming medications each time, this method works on normalising loud noises. As with any behaviour change, this can take time. And, the sooner you start, the sooner you will see results.

The basic principle of this form of therapy is to gradually increase your dog's tolerance to loud noises with the assistance of replicated sounds on a CD. The treatment always takes place in an environment your dog finds safe and begins at the lowest level. Your dog is then praised for not reacting with fear.

Once your dog is acquainted with this process, the level of noise is gradually increased, but only to a level where your dog always feels confident. If fearful signs reappear, the level is reduced and the process is taken back to the beginning.

Some dogs will require a medium term anti-anxiety medication to help him/her to re-learn responses, and often they will need to continue to take calming medications before storms and fireworks during this process. Therefore, it is essential the desensitisation therapy is conducted under the guidance of a vet.

WHAT TO DO DURING FIREWORKS AND STORMS

- It is strongly advised you stay at home with your pet, or organise a trusted pet-sitter for the night who is familiar with your pet.
- Bring your pet inside and provide a safe, relaxed environment.
- To block out flashing lights, draw the curtains closed and keep your lights on. Drown out sounds by turning on the TV, radio or playing soothing music.
- Always stay calm during a storm and go about your activities as normal — your pet will take its cues from you.
- Never punish your pet for their behaviour when they are afraid. They will only learn to associate the punishment with the noise which will reinforce their fear.

Please note: Earplugs are not advised as it is easy to damage your dog's ear by pushing something into it.



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Since our official opening in 1913, we have been a voice for animals without owners caring for thousands of cats and dogs each year. Pioneers for fair animal laws, we continue to work on the front line to reduce the number of lost, abandoned and stray cats and dogs.

We rely on public support to run services and programs, including: proactive adoption, foster care, behaviour rehabilitation, low cost desexing and microchipping, and the promotion of better pet ownership through education.