

**Brain & Cognitive Disorders**

# HOW TO HELP DOGS AFRAID OF THUNDERSTORMS



Similar to fireworks, thunderstorms are loud, unpredictable and often bring unexpected flashes of light. If your dog is afraid of thunderstorms, you can help to ease your dog's fear.

## Why are Dogs Scared of Thunderstorms?

Depending on a dog's personality and past experiences, different parts of a thunderstorm can cause fear or anxiety. As with fireworks, it could be the noise or the flashes of lights.

There is usually more buildup before a thunderstorm than with fireworks (e.g., changes in the barometric pressure, high winds, rain, hail). Dogs may sense the changes in air pressure or may hear the low-frequency rumblings of thunder long before humans can. This can cause anxiety before the storm begins.

## How to Calm Your Dog During a Storm

If your dog has astraphobia, or fear of thunderstorms, try the following tips to help keep your dog calm.

### 1. Remain calm.

Showing your dog that you are calm and relaxed may help your dog understand there is no real danger.

### 2. Create a safe space.

Give your dog a safe indoor space to go during a thunderstorm. A dog that is crate-trained may feel most secure in the crate with a chew toy to occupy the time. Cover wire crates with a blanket to help absorb the sound and leave the door open so your dog does not feel trapped. If your dog does not have a crate or is not comfortable in it, try creating a safe place elsewhere. Your dog's bed should be in a calm, safe place and may be a comfortable option during the thunderstorm. A room in the center of the home without windows is ideal for a safe space. However, if that is not an option, close the blinds or curtains of any windows so your dog cannot see outside.

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### 3. Distract your dog.

Turn on the TV or calming music to conceal the noise of the storm. Or play with your dog. Consider giving your dog a treat-stuffed toy. Do what you can to create positive associations with the sound of thunder.

### 4. Prepare for the next storm.

Try desensitizing your dog to the sounds of thunder. (You can find thunderstorm sounds online for dog desensitization.) Play those sounds quietly in the background as you play games or give treats. If your dog is reacting in a positive manner, then gradually increase the volume of the noises at a pace that your dog is comfortable with. Be careful not to progress too quickly. When successful, the process may take a few weeks to months.

### 5. Talk to your veterinarian.

Your veterinarian is the best person to talk to when it comes to your dog's fear of thunderstorms. Your veterinarian may recommend a supplement that can support calm behavior, such as a probiotic containing the proprietary strain *Bifidobacterium longum* NCC3001 (BL999), alpha-casozepine (derived from milk), or L-theanine (from tea). A Purina study showed that anxious dogs supplemented with the strain of *Bifidobacterium longum* showed a reduction in anxious behaviors. A vest, shirt or wrap that applies light, constant compression may be helpful in some dogs (similar to calming a baby with swaddling). If your dog's signs are severe, your veterinarian may recommend a behavior specialist and/or medications.

Remember to practice positive reinforcement with your dog. Do not scold or punish your dog—the behavior is the result of fear, not disobedience. Although it requires time and effort, teaching your dog new and pleasant associations can help create calm during a storm.

The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.