

**Brain & Cognitive Disorders**

TIPS FOR EASING YOUR DOG'S FEAR OF FIREWORKS



Fireworks are a fun and exciting way to celebrate holidays such as New Year's around the world and Independence Day in the United States.

However, rather than being entertained by fireworks, some dogs find them frightening. In dogs, fear of fireworks is typically considered a noise aversion, although other characteristics of fireworks also may be contributing factors.

If your dog is afraid of fireworks, you can help ease your dog's fear and promote calm behavior.

Why are Fireworks Frightening?

1. Fireworks are loud.

Most fireworks produce loud sounds. Dogs have a more acute sense of hearing than humans, so those loud booms, crackles and whistles may seem alarming.

2. Fireworks are unpredictable.

Fireworks occur without warning. The loud noises and flashing lights sound and look different each time. They occur at different intervals, so dogs cannot easily acclimate to them.

3. Fireworks may appear threatening.

The noise and unpredictability of fireworks may lead dogs to perceive them as a threat. This can trigger their fight-or-flight response. Dogs may bark at the noise, try to run away and hide, or show other signs of anxiety, such as restlessness, panting, pacing and whining.

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How to Keep Your Dog Safe & Calm During Fireworks

Fortunately, the following tips may help ease your dog's fear.

1. Remain calm.

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

2. Keep your dog inside.

Even if your dog spends most of the time outdoors, your dog should remain inside during fireworks displays. Do not bring your dog with you to fireworks displays.

3. Create a safe space.

Give your dog a safe indoor space to go during fireworks. If your dog is crate-trained, make the crate available, as your dog likely perceives it as a safe space. 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 is not comfortable in a crate, try creating a safe place elsewhere, preferably in a room in the center of the home with no windows (otherwise close the blinds or curtains of any windows so your dog cannot see outside). Bringing your dog's bed and blankets into the room can help your dog feel more comfortable.

4. Distract your dog.

Playing music or white noise can help muffle the sound of fireworks. Provide a chew toy or puzzle toy to occupy your dog's time. Try to create positive associations with the sound of fireworks.

5. Prepare for the next fireworks display.

Start working with your dog on the process of desensitization far enough in advance of the next fireworks display. Initially play fireworks sounds at a low volume while playing with your dog and giving treats. (You can find fireworks sounds online for dog desensitization.) If your dog is reacting in a positive manner, over time, slowly increase the sound of the fireworks during these play sessions. Be careful not to progress too quickly. When successful, the process may take a few weeks to months.

6. Talk to your veterinarian.

Your veterinarian is the best person to talk to when it comes to your dog's fear of fireworks. 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.

Since a dog may escape and run away during fireworks, it is critical to ensure that your dog can be identified and that you can be contacted. Be sure to have your dog microchipped and keep your contact information up to date. Consider attaching identification tags to your dog's collar.

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.