

Top Tips!

- 🐾 Walk your dog only at times when he is not going to be exposed to fireworks.
- 🐾 Avoid letting him off the lead when in areas of risk to firework exposure.
- 🐾 Always have your dog's identification tags on him, even if just letting him out in the garden to toilet. It's a legal requirement when in a public space that all dogs must wear a collar with the owner's name and address written on it, or on a tag or badge attached to it. You should also get your dog microchipped, since this means he is more likely to be returned should he get lost.
- 🐾 If your dog has a negative reaction to fireworks, start the training programme detailed in this factsheet as many months as you can before the firework season starts again.
- 🐾 Contact your vet to discuss options to help your dog through this difficult time.
- 🐾 Create a safe place in your home for your dog to retreat to when worried.
- 🐾 Try to engage him in activities that may help him to focus on other things like simple training or food activity toys.
- 🐾 Try not to leave your dog alone in the house when fireworks are being used.
- 🐾 Close curtains and leave the TV or radio on to try to mask the sound.
- 🐾 Read on for more detailed advice on firework fear.



If a dog hasn't been safely and gradually exposed to many different experiences, including loud noises, during his essential socialisation period (3 to 16 weeks of age), when he gets older he may not be able to cope with novel, frightening sounds like fireworks or loud engine noises. We also find that certain breeds of dogs seem to be more sensitive to noises than others, and dogs that are generally anxious or unhappy will also find it much harder to cope. If noise phobias are left unaddressed then they tend to get worse over time, rather than better, so you really do need to act to help your dog if he's scared on fireworks night.

Even though the noise level is supposed to be controlled by recent law, there is little that can be done about the fireworks themselves, so sadly we have to learn to live with them. How can you help your faithful firework-phobic friend get through firework nights? Here are some tips:

- If your dog has only recently developed sensitivity to fireworks or noises, try to **act as if there is nothing to be scared of** – jolly him along and praise him for responding positively.
- If your dog has a serious or long-standing phobia, **give him attention if he requires it** – he'll be too scared for this to act as a reward, so it won't encourage the unwanted behaviour and instead he will benefit from the comfort that this gives him. Essentially though, **try to find out what helps him to cope and be sure to let him do this** – e.g. letting him hide under the table – don't try to coax him out, if this is where he feels safest – he'll come out when he's ready and then you can praise him.
- At very noisy times around Bonfire night, **provide your dog with a safe hiding place** (a suitably sized cardboard box would do) in his favourite room of the house, close the curtains and turn up the volume of your television or radio to drown out the firework noises. Remember not to shut any internal doors, as he may feel trapped and panic.
- **Don't leave your dog alone** in the house, as he may panic and injure himself.
- **A stodgy high-carbohydrate meal** (e.g. with well-cooked rice or pasta) in the late afternoon may help make your dog feel more sleepy and calm during the evening. Also make sure he goes out to toilet before it gets dark and the fireworks start.
- **Try to keep your dog busy** with games or reward-based training, to keep his mind off the noises.
- **Ask your vet about ADAPTIL** – Dog Appeasing Pheromone. This is a scent which you can't smell that comes in a plug-in diffuser, spray or collar that can comfort your dog and help him cope with his fears.

- For dogs with very severe fears on the worst nights, **your vet may be able to prescribe medication** (for example Diazepam). This will not stop your dog from being scared during the night, but causes short term memory loss, so that he won't remember being scared in the morning. This stops the cycle of fear becoming worse, but it's important to do some training to lessen the problem for the next time. Other sedative drugs may make the problem worse.
- **Ask your vet about other drugs** – there are now several drugs available which reduce anxiety levels for dogs. They tend to take some days to have an effect so they cannot be used for short periods but they are often useful to help in the training programme outlined below.
- **Always ask your vet's advice if you are considering other remedies for your dog** – such as homeopathy or Bach Rescue Remedy.

If fear or phobic reactions are severe or cause aggression in your dog, you must see a reputable behaviourist or a vet, who may want to put your dog on a supervised or tailored desensitisation programme – but this will only work if you start long before the firework season begins. Remember that medical conditions can also cause phobias in your dog, so if he displays such signs, it's best to get him checked out anyway.

If your dog is healthy and his problem isn't too severe, you can try the following program yourself. Please remember that incorrect use of this technique may make the problem worse, so proceed with caution. Try to start this programme at least a month (preferably more) before fireworks are expected:

How to help your dog overcome his fear of fireworks noise

The trick is to associate firework noise with something nice for your dog, so that he gets excited and happy, rather than scared, whenever he hears it. You can do this by playing firework noise extremely quietly and then gradually increase the volume, whenever he is enjoying himself. Here's what you need to do:

1) Obtain a sound recording of fireworks noises

Several companies produce these. If you have any problems finding one, try the following:

- Sound Therapy 4 Pets Ltd - 01244 371 473 www.soundtherapy4pets.com
- Crosskeys Books – 020 8590 3604 www.crosskeysbooks.com

2) Now make a list of all the things that your dog loves in life and which produces natural excitement (list as many as you can), for example:

- When you are about to feed your dog.
- When you get your dog's lead out prior to a walk.
- When a family member returns home, having been out without the dog.
- When you greet your dog first thing in the morning.

3) Have your dog in the room with you, making sure he is quite relaxed and lying down (do not make him lie down; wait until he does so of his own accord), then:

- Put your CD/cassette in the stereo and make sure the volume is set as low as it can be.
- Start the CD/cassette and watch your dog carefully. Slowly turn the volume up whilst watching your dog until he shows a sign that he can hear the noise by acknowledging it - this may be by lifting one ear or his head up. However, if he shows any fear related behaviour; flattening his ears; pacing or attempts to leave the area you are working with him in; vocalisation; increased panting; tail tucked under the body or trembling; or other fear related behaviours then reduce the volume one or two notches.
- Mark the level of volume that you reached on your stereo and then switch it off.

4) For the next two weeks you will need to use the following programme:

- Every day, switch your stereo on at the volume which you have previously set, just prior to one of the events you have on your list that makes your dog naturally excited.
- Leave the recording running all the time the dog is naturally excited, switching it off again as the excitement dies down.

On completion of the above, the dog should be showing no fear when the CD/cassette is playing at the set volume, but instead should be associating the noise with the exciting events on your list.

5) Then the following should be done until your dog is happy and relaxed with the recording playing:

- Continue as above, but now gradually increase the volume on the stereo every day, linking this to exciting events on your list.
- If you reach a level on the volume that causes any fear reaction in your dog, go back to your previous setting and repeat for a few more days before proceeding to increase the volume again.

Dogs Trust © 2013. All rights reserved. You may print this factsheet for your own information and photocopy it if multiple copies are required. You may not sell it, reproduce it on the Internet, or reprint it in any publication without permission from Dogs Trust Legal Department.