

## How to help your pet long term

Pets that are scared of fireworks and other loud noises can be treated for their fear using effective behavioural techniques. It takes time and patience, but can achieve excellent results.



- Tell your vet about your pet's fear of loud noises. They'll thoroughly check there isn't a medical reason, e.g. thyroid disease.
- Your vet may recommend behavioural therapy, or suggest referral to a veterinary behaviourist or a behaviour counsellor.
- Behavioural therapy often uses a technique called 'desensitisation and counter-conditioning'. Over time, this teaches your pet that loud noises are nothing to be afraid of.
- Sometimes medication prescribed by a vet is used to help with behavioural therapy.
- Owners sometimes ask vets to prescribe tranquillisers for their pet. Some drugs that were once popular are no longer used as they don't reduce fear, just an animal's ability to respond. This can make a pet's fear of fireworks even worse.

## Our top tips

- Get your pet microchipped in case of escape.
- Make a cosy den a few weeks ahead.
- Try using pet pheromones – calming scents that we can't smell, but help to calm pets.

For more information on the five welfare needs or further advice on looking after your pet, visit [pdsa.org.uk/pet-health-advice](https://pdsa.org.uk/pet-health-advice)

# FIREWORKS AND YOUR PET

## Take the fright out of noisy nights



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# Helping your pet to stay calm and safe

Many pets become anxious and frightened when fireworks are going off and some become extremely distressed. Unlike us, they don't understand why there are loud bangs and flashes outside.

If you own a puppy or kitten, there are steps you can take to reduce the chance of your pet growing up scared of fireworks. If you own an adult pet that's already scared of fireworks, there are ways to help them cope.

## How do I stop them growing up scared?

Get them used to the sounds of everyday life during their first couple of months. Gradually let them hear the washing machine, vacuum cleaner, television and other household noises.

Getting used to sounds during this early 'socialisation period' means they're far less likely to be scared of noises and fireworks as adults.



Playing a sound desensitisation CD is also a good way of getting them used to sounds including firework noises. By doing this, your pet is more likely to be calm and unafraid when they hear real fireworks.

## How do I prepare my dog for firework season?

**Create a den** for your dog to hide in when they hear fireworks, it helps them to cope with their fear. This could be inside a wardrobe or cupboard, or behind a sofa.



Pad it with old pillows and blankets to soundproof it and, in the weeks leading up to fireworks season, give your dog access to the den at all times.

**Give healthy treats and praise** when your dog uses its den, to build a positive association. Don't force your dog to go into the den you've made if they prefer a different hiding place.

**Use a pheromone plug-in** nearby. Pheromones are scents that calm dogs, but we can't smell them. They're available from vets and pet shops.

**Microchip your pet**, just in case the worst happens and they escape from home. That way, there's more chance you will be reunited.

# Signs of stress in pets



## Dogs

- Trembling and shaking
- Clinging to owners
- Excessive barking
- Cowering and hiding behind furniture
- Trying to run away
- Soiling the house
- Pacing and panting
- Refusing to eat.



## Cats

- Cowering and hiding behind or on top of furniture
- Trying to run away
- Soiling the house
- Refusing to eat.



## Rabbits

- Stamping hind feet
- Staying motionless
- Trying to escape.

## What should I do on firework nights?

- Take your dog for a walk well before fireworks are due to begin.
- Keep doors, windows and cat/dog flaps closed.
- Draw the curtains.
- Play music with a repetitive beat to help mask the sounds.
- If your dog is used to seeking reassurance from you in stressful times and wants social contact, don't ignore them and instead comfort them as you would normally. This is a short-term measure to help your pet cope while he or she is afraid. But it is important to change this coping behaviour to one that isn't dependent on you in case you are not always present e.g. by providing a den.
- Never punish your pets - it's not their fault that they're scared, and it adds to their anxiety.
- Try to stay calm yourself, so your pets don't pick up on anything unusual.

Keep your tone, mood and behaviour as normal as possible.

- Let cats hide where they like, don't try to tempt them out.
- Don't pick up cats or restrain them if they're scared: cats prefer to control how they cope.

## What should I do to help small pets and wildlife?

- Partly cover hutches and outdoor cages with blankets, so they're more sound-proofed.
- Make sure your pets have hiding places and secure areas where they can feel safe.
- Give plenty of bedding – this helps keep noise out and provides a hiding place.
- Ensure the bonfire is nowhere near any pets.
- Hedgehogs may think an unlit bonfire is a great place to sleep. So build the fire as late as possible and disturb it around the bottom before lighting, to let any wildlife escape.