

## **Fear of Fireworks in Dogs – Firework Phobia Checklist**

\* **Your dog is not affected by fireworks.**

No action needed. But remember phobias can start at any time of life. Treat early.

\* **Your dog shows mild anxiety to fireworks, becomes tense and apprehensive.**

**Action:** 1 and 2, If the phobia persists then 5.

\* **Your dog is disturbed by fireworks, looks afraid, breathes rapidly, panics.**

**Action:** 1, 2, 3 and possibly 4. Plan to begin 5 as soon as possible.

\* **Your dog is very disturbed by fireworks, shows severe panic and distress.**

**Action:** 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6.

**1. Install a D.A.P. plug-in diffuser and/or use a D.A.P. Collar** –D.A.P. is a pheromone that creates a sense of security and reduces anxiety in dogs. Begin to use the diffuser and/or the collar ideally 2 wks before you expect firework noise. Keep the diffuser switched on at all times and until 1 week after the firework season. D.A.P. products are available from reception. Replace the collar monthly and fit a diffuser re-fill pack monthly.

**2. How you should act when your dog is afraid.** Ignore your dog's fearful behaviour. Act relaxed and happy. Don't give sympathy. If you are able to engage your dog in a lively game this can be beneficial but don't pester or force attention on your dog. Don't become angry at the fireworks! Your dog will pick up on your feelings. Be calm.

**3. Provide a secure refuge.** Fearful dogs need a secure hiding place away from the noise. Provide a den in the centre of the house (away from outside walls and windows). Usually in a corner of a room behind heavy furniture. You might even build a sound-proof indoor kennel. Provide a favourite chew toy such as a stuffed Kong, and a familiar blanket. Plug in the D.A.P. diffuser close to the refuge area.

**4. Medication using our newer safer sedatives** which makes a dog less sedated but calmer emotionally (prescribed by the vet). These sedatives help a dog to forget about the bad experience. **Prescription guide:** Sedatives can be supplied to patients that have **either** been seen by the vet within the last 3 mo. **or** been seen by a nurse within the last 3 mo. and a vet within the last 12 mo.

**5. De-sensitisation.** Plan to desensitise your dog to fireworks using the Fireworks Sound Effect CD ("Sounds Scary") with guidance from our nurses. This needs to be done 2 – 4 months before the firework season or in early spring. The "Sounds Scary" CD works well on mild cases so treat firework phobia before it gets too bad. Severe cases may also need behaviour therapy.

**6. See our behaviourist vet for a full assessment.** The vet will check for medical causes of sound phobia (hormone disorders e.g. thyroid trouble, depression, ear disease, poor vision), then assess the over-all emotional state of your dog and begin behavioural therapy.

### **N.B.**

- If possible feed a good meal before the onset of fireworks, a full stomach reduces anxiety.
- Play music with regular drum beats, it doesn't need to be loud.
- Block out firework flashes with heavy curtains.
- Prevention is better than cure. Treat sound phobia early before it severe.
- Avoid using ACP tablets except for dogs that are just over-excited but show no anxiety. ACP will not reduce fear.

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DH/CA/FireworkPhobia 2/12 [www.vet-healthcentre.co.uk](http://www.vet-healthcentre.co.uk)