

Five ways to help your pets cope with fireworks

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Fireworks can be a spectacular addition to many of our annual celebrations. But sadly they can cause serious distress to our pets.

Many animals show an instinctive fear response to sudden and unexpected loud noises. The bangs, crackling and whistling sounds made by fireworks can be particularly terrifying, especially when displays last for more than a few minutes.

Some pets will adapt and become used to them, but others can develop more deep-seated distress responses. One of my own [dogs](#) reacts badly, and this has become progressively worse as she has got older.

With several festive celebrations potentially involving fireworks on the horizon, now is a good time to consider how best to help our pets remain as calm and happy as possible.

Here are some ways to help your pets cope with the noisiest night of the year.

1. Use reassurance to help them feel safe

The advice is often to ignore your scared pet because you might be "rewarding" the fear. But fear is an emotion and [cannot be reinforced](#) in the same way that behavior can be.

Fear is an [essential protective mechanism](#) to help animals avoid or cope with frightening or dangerous situations.

Animals will often show fight, flight or freeze responses when fearful. We can help our pets cope by providing safety and security when they are afraid.

If your pet seeks comfort from you, be kind, supportive and reassuring through vocal communication and physical touch. But be sure to remain relaxed and upbeat. If you are worried and anxious, you might [transfer that to your pet](#) as they are often adept at picking up on our emotions.

Snuggling up with the TV or radio on to drown out the noise from outside often works for many dogs and cats. Some cats might prefer a quiet, den-like space.

For outdoor pets such as rabbits, consider bringing them indoors or finding other ways to limit their firework exposure.

2. Use food, toys and games to distract and calm

Providing food, treats or toys can be a great way to distract your worried pet. You might even build positive associations with fireworks by doing this. Training or other fun activities can also be useful.

Dogs can benefit from the use of [scented toys](#) and sniffing games. There is research to suggest that using their noses can even make them [more optimistic](#). Many cats love toys filled with catnip, which can have a significant [calming effect](#).

Puzzle or activity feeding toys might be useful in prolonging the delivery of treats as well as giving your pet something else to think about—these are available for cats, dogs, rabbits and other pets.

3. Keep your pets indoors after dark

Every year, pets go missing when scared by fireworks. On bonfire night, the number of dogs that go [missing doubles](#).

Simple measures, including checking garden and fencing security, can play a large part in reducing the risk of a scared animal escaping. Ensure that your pet's microchip details are up to date so that if the worst does happen, they have a much better chance of being returned to their home.

Collars with identity tags are a simple but effective measure, and, in the UK, are also a [legal requirement](#) for dogs in public places. It is worth ensuring that your dogs are exercised in daylight, before the fireworks start. If you do need to go out when it's dark, keeping them on lead will

reduce the risk of them bolting if suddenly scared. But it's best to avoid going out during [fireworks](#) displays if at all possible.

Cats should always be kept indoors on bonfire night, so call them in well before dusk—and lock their cat flap if they have one so they cannot sneak out.

4. Consider medication, alongside behavioral support

If your pet shows severe fear responses, then seeking veterinary and qualified behavioral advice is essential.

Your vet is the best person to advise you and might be able to prescribe a tranquilizer to support your pet.

Medications are often best used alongside a [behavior modification plan](#), so working with an experienced trainer who uses positive reinforcement or an animal behaviorist is a good longer-term strategy.

Animals in pain might also show [increased noise reactivity](#) so it is important to seek veterinary advice to help pets who suffer from other conditions, especially with older animals.

5. Train your pet to get used to loud noises

Exposing [young animals](#) to a range of sights and sounds is a simple way to minimize potential noise-reactivity problems. The use of CDs or podcasts with frightening noises, paired with food, treats or other fun things can be a useful and effective longer-term approach to managing firework-fear through gradual [counter-conditioning and desensitization](#).

This can also work for older [animals](#) as part of a managed training and

support plan, often with the help of a suitably [qualified behaviorist](#).

Fireworks can be frightening for our pets. But with a few practical steps, you can help to make it a little less stressful, both now and in years to come.

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