



Shantock Hall Lane, Bovingdon, HP3 0NQ
Tel: 01442 833198
info@hopevets.com
www.hopevets.com

Fireworks



Fireworks time will soon be upon us, and many pets will be affected by the unpredictable loud noises. Sound fears are a common problem – many cats and just under half of the UK dog population show a fearful response to loud noises. It is important to consider both short and long term aspects of managing this problem.

For many pets and their owners, the annual onset of fireworks bring days of misery and distress. The most common signs of fear exhibited are:

- Panting
- Trembling
- Cowering
- Hiding
- Seeking owners attention
- Climbing or digging
- Becoming withdrawn
- Soiling in the house

Fortunately help is at hand. There are 4 main ways to help:

- Desensitisation
- Adaptil/Feliway
- Zylkene
- Prescription Medications

Desensitisation

This involves gradual exposure of your dog to the sounds of fireworks under controlled conditions. It is possible to purchase CD's of the sounds – these all come with instruction booklets. This is a long term solution to the problem – unfortunately it is too late this year to use this method to full effect, but if you get cracking now your dog may well cope much better next year. See the “sounds scary” website: www.soundtherapy4pets.com

Adaptil/Feliway

Adaptil releases a comforting pheromone into the local environment. These pheromones mimic those secreted by a lactating bitch that serve to reassure the puppies especially in times of stress. Feliway mimics the pheromone that cats use to mark their territory and in this way it makes the cat feel safe and secure in their environment. It has been shown that these effects still work in adult pets. This is the basis for Adaptil/Feliway and they have been used successfully in combating firework phobias.



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Zylkene

Zylkene is a natural product and can help your pet stay calm in many stressful situations such as a house move, a kennel/cattery stay or during the fireworks season. Zylkene has not been associated with side effects such as memory loss and sedation and is easy to give. Simply mix the palatable powder with food or a favourite treat. Zylkene should be started the day before a stressful event and is then continued at one capsule daily.

Prescription Medications

These work by making your dog more 'chilled out' so they care less about the bangs. They are usually quite effective and last a few hours. The main disadvantages are that some dogs are very sensitive to them and may appear 'stoned' or wobbly and they work better if they are administered prior to the onset of the distress, which is not always possible. Also it is not ideal to use them for a few days on the trot. **Not all pets can be given these medications for health reasons and they are available only by prescription from your veterinary surgeon.**

Tips for a stress-free firework season...

Two weeks before the event

Plug in a Adaptil/Feliway diffuser in the room that your pet uses to relax and rest. Leave it plugged in, both day and night.

Make up a small space for your pet to be in if he/she gets worried. An indoor kennel covered with a duvet to dull noise or a very small room with no window is ideal.

Dos and don'ts for fireworks

1. *Do not* punish your pet for being scared – this will only reinforce the behaviour.
2. *Do not* fuss or overly reassure your pet when they are scared, I know this is hard but this only emphasises to your pet that there is something to worry about.
3. *Do* put on music with lots of constant drum beats – it doesn't have to be loud.
4. *Do* ignore the bangs yourself and play with your pet.
5. *Do* draw the curtains as blacking out the room will minimize further distress from flashing lights.
6. *Do* ensure the room is safe and secure so your pet can't bolt and escape if a sudden noise occurs.
7. *Do not* take your pet outside while the fireworks are going on.
8. *Do* be prepared for unusual behavior.
9. *Do* provide a den or hiding place.
10. *Do* stay calm yourself!!

After the event

After fireworks season has passed it is time to think about long term control of the problem. Fear of fireworks tends to get worse over time and can expand to include fear of other loud noises, such as thunder if ignored. Sound desensitisation is the most effective way to combat this problem in the long term. Please ask a member of staff about desensitization CD's. If you have chosen to use a diffuser please leave the diffuser plugged in for another week whilst everything calms down.

Good Luck!!!!

At Hope Vets we like to treat every pet as an individual, as not all firework treatments work for all pets. Please ring us on 01442 833 198 for further help and information.

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