



## Fireworks and Your Pet

### What to expect

With Halloween and Fireworks Night fast approaching it signals the start of a traumatic period for some pets. Fireworks displays are a regular occurrence not only around these dates but also the festive season and New Year. If you know your pet is likely to be scared or anxious during the fireworks onslaught then a pre-emptive, preventative approach is going to help the most. Learning to recognise the early signs of fear and distress in your pet will enable you to calm them before they get to an all-out terrified state. For instance, pacing, clinginess and trembling may indicate a mildly anxious dog, whereas hiding, whining and soiling can indicate a more severe state of fear. Cats will usually try to escape scary situations and will rarely seek out human attention during times of fear.

### What can you do

- Keep your pet indoors when fireworks are being used (this includes rabbits and guinea pigs); it is much safer for them.
- Make your house into a safe haven - ensure there are plenty of hiding places in a calm and safe environment. Consider making a den for your dog with some favourite toys and treats available.
- When fireworks are going off, ensure there is access to other background noises, like the TV or radio, to distract your pet.
- Enhance the 'safe haven' effect by using a pheromone diffuser, such as Adaptil® (for dogs) or Feliway® (for cats). These need to be started at least 5 days before fireworks season starts. They release synthetic versions of the chemicals produced by suckling bitches/queens that help to reassure a mother's offspring during nursing.
- Use food supplements such as Zylkène® and Calming Aid for dogs® which contain L-tryptophan and the milk protein casein which can increase well-being, provided they are started at least 3-4 days beforehand.

### Your behaviour

Dogs will appreciate company during times of anxiety so best to be around them if possible. Dogs and cats will pick up on your anxiety at home, so you must remain calm. Act normally and try not to reassure your pet too much - excessive reassurance will confirm their suspicions that they need to be scared. Similarly, do not punish them as this will just increase their state of anxiety. If you act normally during this time your pet is more likely to consider these noises to be normal, and is less likely to panic.

### Dealing with severe anxiety

In cases where the anxiety is severe then your vet may recommend medication. Tranquilisers may be used for severe anxiety, although these will usually be started before the stressful event to ensure they are well tolerated by your pet. They can be useful when none of the above recommendations achieve anxiety control. In some cases longer term anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medication can be helpful.

Long term prevention relies on trying to desensitise your pet's sensation of fear to the sounds of fireworks. There are CD's and audio downloads (e.g. Sounds Scary®) with fireworks sounds that can be played to your pet. The sounds are played very quietly initially and over time the volume is increased until they are well tolerated. Please speak to a vet or nurse if you would like any further information or would like to discuss your pet's firework phobia.