

Top tips

- 🐾 Walk your dog only at times when he or she is not going to be exposed to fireworks. For example walk in the morning and play inside rather than going for a walk in the evening during the period when fireworks may be let off.
- 🐾 If your dog reacts to fireworks, contact your vet to discuss options to help your dog through this difficult time.
- 🐾 Create a safe enclosed area in your home for your dog, which he can retreat to if worried.
- 🐾 Try not to leave your dog alone in the house when fireworks are being used.
- 🐾 Close curtains and leave the TV or radio on to try to mask the sound of the fireworks.
- 🐾 If your dog is not worried, trying to hide or seeking reassurance, you could engage them in activities like simple training or food activity toys, to keep their focus away from the noises outside. If he trying to hide, it is best to leave him alone.
- 🐾 Your dog should also be microchipped and have ID tags (both legal requirements), since this means if you encounter fireworks unexpectedly and he startles and runs off, he is more likely to be returned.

Firework fears in dogs can be effectively treated, but behavior modification programs need to start at least a couple of months before the start of firework events. If your dog is scared of fireworks, then speak to your vet well in advance of the fireworks season about referral to a certified clinical animal behaviourist who will be able to give you specific advice for your dog. There are tips about the types of programme used by behaviourists to treat firework fears at the end of this factsheet.

Read on for more detailed advice on firework fear.

A fear of fireworks is very common in dogs: recent research suggests that as many as half of owners report that their dog shows signs of anxiety or fear during loud noises. So, if your dog reacts by trembling, shaking, trying to hide or escape, or seeks reassurance from you then you are not alone. Dogs don't understand that fireworks are part of our celebrations: for them they are very sudden, unpredictable, bright and extremely loud and it's not surprising that so many become scared. Fears like this can be prevented by making sure that puppies and young dogs are introduced gradually to these types of noise. If they first experience firework noises at a low volume, introduced carefully by playing a specially recorded soundtrack, then they are less likely to become fearful later in life.

If your dog is not anxious of loud noises, then it is important to maintain their relaxed behaviour. Act as if there is nothing to be scared of yourself when there are fireworks going off. Behave normally, and give your dog lots of **praise when he or she is relaxed and calm during the fireworks**. You can also have the TV or radio on to try and reduce the impact of the fireworks, and keep your dog busy with games or reward-based training, to keep their attention off the noises.

However, if you have a dog who is already scared of firework noises, then on the following page are some tips for you to help them cope!

In the short-term:

- 🐾 **Speak to your vet** about pharmacological support; dogs with severe fears can be prescribed medication to reduce anxiety. Some medications can also block memory, so he is less likely to remember the scary events, and this will help with longer term rehabilitation. **Always ask your vet's advice if you are considering other remedies for your dog.**
- 🐾 **Prepare your dog for an indoor kennel** or other small space:
 - This will act as his “den”.
 - It should be in a location he can access from anywhere in the house
 - It should be somewhere enclosed, away from the flashes of the fireworks and where the noises are more muffled.
 - You can help to muffle the noises by wrapping the den in blankets or a duvet, closing the curtains, or by turning up the television or playing music to cover the sounds.
 - Always leave the door of the den open so he can come and go as he pleases.
 - Introduce the den some time before fireworks events, encouraging him to use the space. For example, give your dog treats or a chew inside the den, and praise him or her when they choose to go inside.
- 🐾 If your dog goes off to hide, then it is best to leave him or her alone. It is important to not try and encourage your dog out or remove them their hiding place during the fireworks, but give lots of praise when he or she comes out afterwards.
- 🐾 If your dog comes to you for reassurance whilst fireworks are going off, there is nothing wrong with comforting him or her in the short term. In the past, there has been advice that dogs should be ignored if they seek attention when scared, to avoid reinforcement of the fear. However, it is important that you don't suddenly stop giving reassurance to your dog if he depends on it to cope with the loud noises – doing so will only make him panic more. During a fireworks event is not the time to think about changing his behaviour. However, this is something to plan for the future, as discussed below.

In the longer term:

If your dog has an established fear or phobia of loud noises, treatment involves teaching him or her a different way of coping with their fears. Speak to your vet about referral to a specialist, who will be able to give you a specific programme of advice for your dog. Your vet will also be able to advise you whether your dog will need support from medication to help cope with firework events. Behaviour therapy programmes recommended for firework fears include a number of different elements. These often include:

- 🐾 **Teaching your dog that firework noises are not scary after all.** This is done by very gradually associating firework noise with something nice, so that your dog is relaxed when he hears them. You can do this by playing firework noise extremely quietly and then gradually increase the volume as he begins to get used to it and associate the noise with something pleasurable.

An example of this type of programme is given below:

- Obtain a free sound recording of fireworks noises from [Sounds Scary](#)

- Have your dog in the room with you and only when he is calm and relaxed, start to play the fireworks track with the sound on the very lowest setting, so you can barely hear it.
- With the track playing, play with him or give a long-lasting treat such as a Kong or a chew.
- With your dog calm and relaxed, you can now very gradually start to increase the volume, but you are looking for Rover to stay totally calm and not react at all to the noises, acknowledging it with a glance up or a tilt of the ear is the only reaction you want. If he shows *any* sign of fear (flattening ears, pacing, attempting to leave, panting, tucked tail, trembling or peeing) then reduce the volume immediately until he is relaxed again.
- Continue to increase the volume very gradually and after a few minutes of practice and relaxed and calm behaviour, note the volume level you reached and turn off the track.
- Repeat steps 3-5, starting each session on whatever volume level you reached in the previous session. If at any point you reach a volume that causes a fear reaction, then go back to the previous setting and repeat for a few more days before you try increasing the volume again.

The length of time the programme takes will vary from dog to dog, but after a while he should be relaxed with an increasing volume of sound and should be associating the noises with a tasty treat.

🐾 Teach your dog an alternative coping response when anxious.

If your dog seeks reassurance from your when loud noises are going off, it is important to not change how you react whilst they are scared. Suddenly changing your response will cause your dog a lot of distress. However, it is important that you teach him or her a different way of coping in the longer term. This is because you may not always be present when your dog is worried: should fireworks go off when you are not at home it will be much more scary for them. Teaching your dog to cope by hiding away in a den will make sure that they always have a way of coping with being anxious, whether you are about or not. This can be achieved by gradually teaching your dog to use a den area, as explained earlier. Depending on the behavior of your dog, a behaviourist may also ask you to gradually change the way you react to your dog when they seek reassurance in less scary situations.