

# Colne Valley Extra



## Be fireworks aware!

It is thought as many as 45% of dogs become stressed and fearful while fireworks are going off. A major problem is the length of the 'firework season' due to the ready availability of fireworks. They are used at private parties as well as organised public events and, indeed, for celebrations at any time of the year, not just on 5th November.

**Dogs** should be able to retreat to a safe haven or den in the home, an area where they feel secure. It may be a place your dog already uses, adapted to be as comfortable, dark and quiet as possible, or a manmade temporary option such as a cardboard box or crate. Preparing a den in advance allows your dog to become used to the area and accept it as a safe place. A towel or blanket can be placed over the den to reduce the sounds and lights of the fireworks. Your dog should have access to the den at all times.

The dog appeasing pheromone Adaptil® has been shown to reduce anxiety and help dogs cope with challenging situations, including fireworks. Adaptil is easy to use and it is available as a diffuser, collar and spray. It reduces the intensity of a dog's fear response. Using an Adaptil diffuser or collar from October can help to combat any anxiety your dog experiences in the run-up to fireworks displays. Using Adaptil spray on your dog's bedding can offer additional support during stressful events. For short term support, Adaptil Express tablets can be administered two hours before a fireworks display is anticipated, or start Zylkene® capsules a few days beforehand.

Additionally:

- Ensure dogs are taken out for a walk and/or to do their business before it becomes dark to avoid the need to be taken out later during the fireworks
- Punishing or soothing your dog may increase the intensity of the experience or reward inappropriate behaviour. Instead, consider distracting him with a chew, toy, puzzle feeder or a game. Having a meal before the fireworks start can also help: your dog may not want to eat during the event if too anxious
- Ensure your dog has access to his water bowl as anxious dogs can pant more
- Keep curtains closed, have the television on or play music, and stay with your dog
- Make an appointment with the practice if your dog has a more severe reaction to noises, as he may need medication to help him during the firework season

- Older dogs may find fireworks more challenging than previously, as they can start to find changes to routine difficult. Alternatively, those dogs which start to develop hearing loss as they age may cope better.

Long term, desensitisation and counter-conditioning have been shown to be safe and effective methods for treating sound sensitivities. The 'Sounds Scary' resource available on the Dogs Trust website is a good home tool. However, your dog needs to be relaxed during this training, i.e. do not attempt this just before or during the firework season.

Exposing puppies to many different stimuli during their socialisation period can help prevent fears in adult life. There is a different version of the sounds desensitisation programme which can help with this process – Sounds Scary/Sounds Sociable.

**Cats** are not thought to show sound sensitivities as dogs do; however, they will be frightened by the loud bangs and flashes of fireworks. Therefore, during the firework season you should keep your cats indoors from mid-afternoon, as dusk approaches. This change in routine and confinement to the home can sometimes cause cats to become upset and show unwanted behaviours such as urine marking or difficulty urinating, scratching at furniture and inter-cat tension. If your cat appears to be unable to pass urine, and especially if your cat is male, then please contact the veterinary practice without delay.

You can help your cats cope with these changes by providing enough litter trays throughout the house and ensuring all of the cats in the household have safe places to hide. These are often up high, for example on the top of cupboards, but could also be under a bed or in a box. Once your cat has found a safe spot for the night, leave him alone and do not try to coax him out, as this refuge is where he feels most secure. Plugging a Feliway® classic diffuser into an electric socket in the room where your cat spends most of his time or where his safe place is located, at least 48 hours before fireworks are anticipated, will help to ensure he feels as safe and secure as possible. There is also a Feliway spray which can be applied to your cat's bedding on the night of fireworks in the area to provide additional support.

**Small animals and birds** all need to be treated with special care as these animals are easily frightened. Hutches, cages and enclosures should, if possible, be brought into a quiet room indoors, or into a garage or shed. Providing extra bedding for them, so they can burrow down into it, can help the pet feel more secure. Aviaries should be covered with thick blankets to block out the sight and sound of the fireworks, but care should be taken to ensure there is enough ventilation in the aviary.

Many pets find fireworks frightening, but there is much that can be done to support them. For further information please contact the practice or visit [www.adaptil.com/uk](http://www.adaptil.com/uk) or [www.feliway.com/uk](http://www.feliway.com/uk).

