



Fireworks! Be Prepared!

Firework season is nearly upon us again and approximately two thirds of our pets are scared of fireworks. So how can you help your pet deal with this potentially scary time of year?

1. Monitor your animal for signs of stress:

Signs of stress in dogs include:

- o Loss of appetite
- o Increase or decrease in resting
- o Yawning
- o Lip licking
- o Head turns
- o Hiding
- o Barking
- o Seeking out people/other dogs
- o Panting
- o Salivating
- o Elimination of urine or faeces
- o Vomiting
- o Freezing
- o Fidgeting
- o Trembling

Signs of stress in cats include:

- o Excessive grooming and scratching
- o Meowing
- o Urinating outside of the litter tray
- o Hiding
- o Running away and refusing to eat
- o Darting around the house
- o Acting aggressively towards owners and other pets

2. Be prepared:

Natural calming products such as Calmex or Pet Remedy can be used. These can be very supportive. We also advise the use of *pheromones*. Adaptil and Feliway are synthetic copies of natural pheromones and have been scientifically proven to provide support in challenging and stressful situations, including during firework season.

ThunderShirts can also be helpful, a bit like swaddling an infant. They act by applying constant gentle pressure to the upper body which can release calming hormones.

We no longer recommend the use of older classes of sedatives as they have no beneficial effect on an animal's emotional state, and just affect their mobility. This results in a terrified animal with no ability to do anything about it! A secondary effect of sedatives is that they reduce inhibition (a bit like alcohol does in people). Reduced inhibition has caused dogs to attack (and sometimes kill) other animals in the household.



We do, however, have other drugs available that provide effective short-term support. These are prescription only products so a discussion with your vet will be necessary.

3. On the day:

These are Castle Vets top tips for keeping your animals safe and helping them to cope

- Walk dogs before it gets dark and make sure they are on a lead with a well-fitting harness or collar.
- Make sure collar tags and microchip details are up to date.
- Ensure all windows and doors are shut and close any curtains.
- Lock or block cat flaps to stop pets escaping.
- Switch on a television or radio to drown out some of the noise.
- Don't leave your pets alone in the house if possible.
- Provide hiding places (such as a den, lined with used blankets or clothes).
- Provide activities that involve licking, chewing and sniffing (such as Licki Mat, snuffle mat, stuffed Kongs) which are all calming behaviours for dogs. Start using these before the fearful event so that your pet becomes familiar with them.
- Let your animals hide if they want to - don't try and force them to go in or come out.
- Keep in mind that cats feel more comfortable in high resting places.
- Try not to react to the fireworks or show concern.
- Stroke and talk to your pets in a calm manner (if they are looking for interaction).
- Provide extra litter trays for cats.
- Never punish or get angry with your pet.
- Never take your pet to a firework display.
- If you have rabbits or guinea pigs either bring them indoors or cover hutches with a blanket but make sure there is sufficient ventilation. A cardboard box with holes in filled with hay placed in the hutch makes a great hiding place.



4. Be proactive:

Animals that are scared of fireworks can also become increasingly reactive to other sounds that are similar - such as thunder, doors slamming and gun shots. Desensitisation programmes are very effective for both cats and dogs who find loud noises stressful. These programmes need to be started in a period when it is unlikely that they will be exposed to fireworks, so we recommend starting this in Feb/March time. We have a qualified behaviourist on the team that can discuss this further with you

There is increasing evidence of a link between noise phobias and other health conditions including chronic pain. An appointment with your vet is recommended initially to rule out other health conditions, especially if this is a new phobia.

For more information about any of the products mentioned or to make a vet appointment contact Castle Vets on 01566 772211



Helping your cat stay happy at the vets

We know that many of the cats that come to visit us here at the practice find the experience stressful. These tips may help make the experience easier for you, and your cat:

- A good cat carrier – a sturdy, easy to clean cat carrier is essential. Top-opening carriers make it easier for you to lift your cat in and out.
- Large cats, or cats who become agitated, should have baskets that do not separate around the middle. If too much tension is placed on the box, the two halves will separate, and the door will fall out.
- Owners should ensure that ALL of the clips and fastenings are correctly locked into place before walking from their car to the waiting room.
- Placing a hand underneath the carrier rather than using just the handle will help put less tension on the plastic and fastenings.
- Covering the carrier with a towel or blanket can help keep your cat stay calm when travelling and waiting for their appointment.
- Keeping your cat carrier out at home and encouraging your cat to eat and sleep in the carrier means they will be less likely to associate it with a visit to the vets!
- Familiar smells – using bedding and blankets that your cat uses regularly and that carries their scent can help them feel less stressed. You can also spray the carrier with a pheromone spray such as Feliway 30 minutes before travelling to help them feel calmer.
- Some cats get car sick on the trip into the vets, so please feel free to bring along spare bedding and we can help you clean the carrier ready for your pet's journey home.
- We have a cat only waiting area at the practice with tables for your cat's carrier to sit on, so they are not on the floor, and towels to cover their carrier.

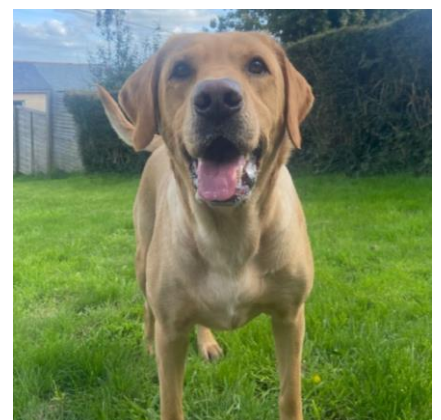


Blood Donation

Unfortunately, we still have very few dogs on our donation list, so we need your help! There are specific criteria that need to be met for a dog to be eligible, but if your pet meets these requirements please get in touch.

- Under 8 years old
- Over 25kg
- In good health with a calm temperament
- No foreign travel

Your dog will be booked in with one of our nurses for a blood test to determine whether they are a positive or negative blood type. Please bear in mind that your dog may be needed at short notice, and at any time, if we have an animal in the surgery requiring a donation, so the closer you live to the surgery the better. As a thank you to you and your pet, a £50 credit will be applied to your account each time your pet donates blood. Please do get in contact with us if you think your pet may be suitable.



Meg is one of our donors! She belongs to our student veterinary nurse Erin.