



## **PRIORY VETERINARY SURGEONS FIREWORKS ADVICE**

**We know that fireworks season can be a very stressful time for pets with all the loud bangs as they go off, and is increasingly a cause of concern for owners as the season seems to extend through most of the winter months now. Ideally any dog with a sound sensitivity should receive a long term behavioural modification plan which should be started once the firework period is over, but many people either don't realise that their dog will be stressed by fireworks, or have left it too late to implement a plan like this. We have a lot of phone calls from concerned owners asking for advice so below are a few tips on how to minimise the stress for your pets:**

1. The best way to prepare for fireworks is to think like a dog about fireworks. They feel scared as they are alarmed by the loud noises of the fireworks but do not understand that fireworks cannot harm them and feel safer when their home feels **safe and secure**. For dogs, building them a den can provide them with a 'safe place' for them to go to when the fireworks start: ideally this should be in an area that the dog already seeks out e.g. behind the sofa, and should be set up as far in advance of the fireworks as possible. It is best to try and make this sound proof as much as possible with heavy blankets as well as bedding inside. Cats will often prefer to have an 'escape hole' high up to go and hide in, and you can place a blanket up there for them to hide under.
2. The use of **pheromones** can be very useful in aiding the management of noise phobias in dogs and cats. Pheromones are natural chemical 'signals', which are secreted by animals to communicate different types of messages to themselves or others. One pheromone dog's use is called the 'dog appeasing pheromone' that a mother produces to reassure her puppies. This pheromone has been proven to not only reassure puppies, but also adult dogs in challenging situations such as fireworks night. **ADAPTIL®** is a synthetic copy of this pheromone and studies have shown its effectiveness in helping dogs with sound sensitivities. Plugging in an ADAPTIL diffuser or using an ADAPTIL collar early will help create a calm atmosphere in your home to help your dog with firework anxiety. **FELIWAY®** is the cat equivalent and this comes in either a diffuser or spray – sometimes it can be helpful to spray their beds or the blanket that you have

placed wherever they choose to hideaway. These pheromone treatments should ideally be started a week or two before the fireworks start and continued for a week after they finish.

3. Alternative and **natural remedies** include Nutracalm, Zylkene and Pet remedy. They have various modes of action but essentially all are natural products that act to promote feelings of calmness and well-being in your pet. Ingredients include L-tryptophan (serotonin precursor) and milk hydrolysate (as found in their mother's milk). Zylkene can take up to a week to take effect but Nutracalm can be started on the day before the fireworks begin and should still be just as effective although it is always best to start a few days in advance.
4. **Thundershirts** can be useful in some dogs as these wrap tightly around them and give them physical comfort.
5. On the night it is important to try and maintain a **normal routine** and not react to the pet's anxiety. If you the owner are calm and behaving normally this is reassuring to your pet, as will be a soothing voice and stroking in most of them. Loud music and TV noise can help to muffle the bangs. Dogs should be exercised well during the day to tire them out & fed a high carbohydrate dinner that evening. Keep cats inside, providing litter trays for them to use. Ensure that **windows, doors and cat flaps are all secured shut** so that pets cannot escape if they do become scared. It is often helpful to try and provide some new toys or treats to distract them as well.
6. If none of the above helps your pet enough then they may need some **prescription medication** so please contact reception if this is the case and they will arrange an appointment with one of our veterinary surgeons to decide on the best course of action for each individual animal.