

“SOUND” ADVICE FOR PETS WITH NOISE PHOBIA

“Before a distant rumble and dark clouds could even alert us to an approaching storm, our dog, Jake, would get nervous. Panting heavily, he would push against us and look up, as if asking for help. Poor Jake would tremble as the rumbles grew louder until we got into the house, where he would slink from room to room.”



Noise phobia—the excessive fear of startling sounds such as fireworks, thunder, or gunshots—is a serious condition that may cause a pet to injure himself or damage property. If your pet is scared by loud noises, it is not OK.

Noise phobias are real problems for some dogs, and even some cats. After all, dogs can hear a wider range of frequencies than humans can, and cats can hear a higher pitch. Dogs and cats can also turn their ears, allowing them to take in surrounding sounds. Combine that with all of the other higher-functioning senses they possess and it’s easy to see why they are more easily affected.

In addition, genetics, early conditioning, exposure to alarming sounds, and even circumstances such as being shipped by plane may play roles in developing noise phobia.

It won’t help or hurt your dog if you hug. You cannot positively reinforce fear. In other words, hugging your dog won’t make him more fearful. With that said, it also will not teach him coping skills, so he will not get better, either.

Research has not yet discovered all the pieces of this phobia puzzle. It has found that some products can help, though they can be a matter of trial and error.

These include:

- Medications such as alprazolam or fluoxetine, on the advice of a veterinarian
- Calming vests
- Pheromone products that mimic the animal’s calming or appeasing natural pheromones
- Nutraceuticals such as L-theanine, a water-soluble amino acid, or melatonin, a hormone
- Soothing music or white noise

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However, the best solution is to give pets the ability to deal calmly with loud noises without their owners.

One of the best ways to do that is to teach your pet to go to a safe place when he is afraid. For example, it might be his crate, under the bed or a spot in a closet. A closet often works best as the clothes hanging in the closet help to further absorb some of the noise. Whatever you provide, it should be fixed up to be a bunker-like place, insulated from the sounds and away from windows. When your pet is first getting used to it, help by engaging him with play, treats, or affection.