



Managing Firework Anxiety and other Noise Phobias

Fairhaven Veterinary Hospital strongly supports the Bellingham City ban on fireworks, primarily due to the severe anxiety firework noise causes for so many of our pets.

Unfortunately, many people ignore this ban, and no ban exists in the County, so we must still be prepared to help our pets through the Independence Day holiday, and other times when sudden, loud noises cause anxiety and fear. ***Please remember that your pet's fear is an involuntary response and that scolding your pet will only increase anxiety. Rather, stay calm yourself and gently reassure your pet without overemphasizing the frightening nature of the sounds.***

Medication: Given the infrequent need for managing Noise Phobias in most pets, and the severity of the anxiety in many pets, medications to reduce anxiety and cause moderate-heavy sedation the day of the anticipated event(s) is the most effective and easiest treatment for most pets.

- **Medications should be given at least two-hours BEFORE noises start and anxiety sets-in.** It is much harder to control the severe fear response after it has started. Medications can be repeated every 6-8-hours as needed.
- **Dosing requirements vary quite a bit from animal to animal.** Ideally, trial doses are given prior to the anticipated event, and doses are adjusted up or down to achieve a calm, moderately-heavy sedated animal.
- **Medications should provide both anxiety reduction and sedation.** Options include:
 - **Trazodone combined with Gabapentin:** We use these medications extensively to help animals remain calm in the animal hospital, and they can really help with noise phobias as well. While Trazodone alone may be enough for animals who react very mildly, they are used in combination most of the time for best effect.
 - **Ace-Promazine combined with Alprazolam:** Ace-Promazine has been used for years for this purpose, but, used alone, provides only sedation with no anxiety relief – it should always be combined with Alprazolam (a valium-related medication) for best effect. ***Ace-promazine should not be used in animals with a history of seizures.***

If sedation is excessive from these medications, don't worry – it will wear off. When next needed, reduce the dose by $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$. ***Calming medications are used to significantly reduce the fearful response to noises, but they cannot completely eliminate the fearful response***

Environmental Control: Exposure to the loud noises should be minimized as much as possible.

- Confine your pet in the quietest part of your home, and close blinds/drapes. This not only limits exposure to the fear-inducing noise, but it also protects your pet from physical harm. We see too many pets that escape their yards due to severe noise anxiety, and injure themselves in their panic.
- Use ear plugs, cotton-balls, or ear muffs. Remember to remove them when fireworks are over that evening!
- Use environmental "White Noise" or Music to minimize the startling nature of the sudden noises. Television noise or sounds from a White-Noise Cell-Phone App can work very well. Some find that music that has some percussive sounds (rap music, etc) more effectively reduce the intrusive noises.

Natural Aids: These can work well for very mild anxiety, or can be added to the above measures for enhanced effect

- **Adaptil (dogs) and Feliway (cats):** We use these calming pheromones extensively in the animal hospital to reduce anxiety. They are available as collars, plug-in diffusers, or environmental sprays. They are species-specific – you must use Adaptil in dogs and Feliway in cats.
- **Thundershirt:** This commercially available, tight-fitting garment provides a calming effect for some dogs and cats, somewhat like "swaddling" a baby.
- **Zylkene:** This milk-protein, derived supplement can provide mild calming. It is available through our online store accessed via our website, Fairhavenvet.com.