

ORCHARD HILLS VETERINARY HOSPITAL

Thunderstorms and Fireworks

The Facts

Dogs hear much better than humans, and noises that have little or no effect on us may terrify a dog. In fact many dogs are extremely sensitive to loud noises, especially fireworks. They may be 'thunder phobic' i.e. extremely frightened by the sound of thunder. A dog can sense the fall in atmospheric pressure with the approach of a storm. Many dogs will associate these changes with the frightening noise of thunder long before owners become aware of the approach of a storm. Sensitive dogs begin to show signs of nervousness and agitation. These include panting, tail between the legs, shaking, trying to hide, barking at the sky and no appetite.

Put yourself in your dogs shoes

The sound of fireworks exploding in the night air invariably travels a very long way and can terrify dogs even a few kilometres away. Australia Day, New Year's Eve and other festive occasions with fireworks cause hundreds of dogs to flee their homes in panic. If not injured or killed by traffic, dogs that panic and run can end up kilometres away within an hour. To save themselves the anxiety of trying to find a lost, panic-stricken dog, pet owners should also be aware of any celebrations in their surrounding area that may include fireworks and take appropriate action to ensure their pet is safely housed before the first festive explosion sounds.

How can you help

No matter what noise scares your dog it will probably seek out you or some other person for comfort and protection. Don't ignore these symptoms just because you can't hear anything or if you can, you don't think it anything to worry about. Some frightened dogs may hide under the house or the bed, or in an open cupboard etc. Others, however if left uncontrolled and un-comforted, will escape and runaway in a state of total panic. If you believe your dog is beginning to show signs of anxiety calm it by keeping it close to you, gently pet it and talk in soothing tones. Ensure that the dog is in an escape proof area, such as the laundry room. Be aware that the frightened dog may try to bolt through doors as you open them. Don't assume that because your dog is in the backyard it will be OK; dogs that are frightened of loud noises will do anything to escape them, including jump over a fence that might normally keep it enclosed. Give your dog a warm tasty meal or milk health drink (although some frightened dogs won't want to eat anything) Turn on a radio to help mask the sounds of the storm or fireworks.

What can Vet's do to help?

If the above precautions are not enough please pay us a visit and we can discuss other options such as - DESENSITISATION - by using appropriate thunderstorm etc noise tapes. This method requires dedication on the part of the Owner and has some degree of success. We have the C.D's available for sale together with full

instructions. Use of “anti-anxiety” drugs for the more severe cases. This requires that you bring the dog in for a behavioural consultation. A new ‘natural’ anti-anxiety herbal formulation is now available through Vets which is offering relief to at least 60% of patients.

What to do if your dog goes missing

Search your local environment several times – FIRST under things, behind things etc. Terrified dogs can curl up into very small balls. If you have no success, start contacting ALL local Vets as well as the local Council. Put signs up at local shops, community centres etc. If your dog has been microchipped & a tag placed on its collar it stands the best chance of being re-united to its family. Microchipping is now a legal requirement from the council. It is the most effective way of finding a lost pet as no matter which veterinary clinic or pound will be able to trace the microchip information.