



**Emma Rixon, RVN**

Emma trained and qualified at the Moor Cottage Veterinary Hospital in Berkshire where she later became head nurse. Her main passion is in animal welfare and behaviour, which is something she hopes to develop in her new role as technical adviser for Ceva Animal Health.

# Beating the bangs!

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**ABSTRACT:** With the firework season looming, followed closely by Christmas and New Year, we must think about how our pets will react to the loud noises and bright lights. This article outlines the practical steps that owners can take to help their pets throughout the party season and, in turn, help prevent fears turning into phobias.

Fear can be considered a healthy response to loud noises, because it triggers the body's natural response to potential danger. However, if a rational fear turns into an irrational phobia, it can become a problem for owners as well as a welfare issue for pets.

## Somewhere safe to hide

Preparing a den is an important part of helping a pet cope with a fear of fireworks by providing a safe haven (**Figure 1**).

If not available permanently, the den should be created at least one month before fireworks begin. This allows the pet to become familiar with the den and learn to view it as a positive place. This can be encouraged with toys and treats.<sup>1</sup>

A den can be created using a pet crate, a box or by covering a space with blankets to create a dark and enclosed area in which to hide. If the pet already has a preferred place to go when feeling fearful, then this is where the den should be created.

Cats may prefer to be up high, so remember this when creating a safe haven for them.

The den should be large enough for the animal to lie down comfortably and should be positioned away from windows and outside doors, where the fireworks will be loudest and most visible. Adding the pet's normal bedding will make the den feel more familiar and covering it with blankets will block out lights and reduce noise.

## Blocking out the bangs and flashes

Closing curtains and leaving the television and lights on will help mask the flashing lights and noises from the fireworks. Creating the den where the family spends most time during the evenings will give the pet some company and help muffle the sound of fireworks with conversation.

## Behave normally

Fears can be reinforced by comforting a pet when it is in a state of anxiety. It is, therefore, best to leave the pet alone and carry on as normal during fireworks. This allows the pet to take whatever course of action it finds most comforting and helps reduce its stress levels, because no one else is showing fear or concern.

## Exercise and toileting

Before fireworks begin, ensure the pet has had adequate exercise and toileting opportunities to help promote relaxation and reinforce normal routine.

Try to keep a cat's routine as normal as possible to prevent stress, but make sure the cat is indoors and the cat flap is closed before fireworks begin. Ensure the cat has easy access to litter trays, food and water whilst indoors.<sup>2</sup>

## Distraction

Treats, chews and toys are a good way to keep a pet occupied and distract it from fireworks.

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Figure 1. Preparing a den is an important part of helping a pet cope with a fear of fireworks

## Pheromone Support

Pheromones are a natural chemical produced by animals, some of which act as a source of reassurance and familiarisation. Synthetic copies of these particular pheromones have been proven to reduce fear and anxiety.

Plugging in an Adaptil (dog appeasing pheromone) diffuser or Feliway (feline facial pheromone) diffuser during the party fireworks season can reduce fear intensity and stress and can help the pet to feel comforted and reassured.<sup>2&3 vi</sup>

### References

1. Mills, D., Braem Dube, M. & Zulch, H. (2013) *Stress and Pheromonotherapy in Small Animal Clinical Behaviour*, Wiley-Blackwell.
2. Gunn-Moore, D. A. & Cameron, M. E. (2004) *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* **6**: 133-138.
3. Sheppard, G. & Mills, D. S. (2003) Evaluation of dog-appeasing pheromone as a potential treatment for dogs fearful of fireworks, *The Veterinary Record*. **152**: 432-436.

## NEWS REVIEW by Jean Turner

### Firm hosts 'firework fears and noise phobias' webinar

Ceva Animal Health is hosting a 'Firework fears and noise phobias' online seminar to provide veterinary professionals and SQPs with practical advice on how pet owners should care for their dogs and cats during the firework season.

The hour-long webinar, which is available on-demand, features practical information on adapting a home to provide a safe and calm environment for a pet. It includes information on how to build a den for a dog, details on a 'sound sensitivity questionnaire' to assess a dog's sensitivity to fireworks, together with an overview of general well-being and care for animals and the importance of understanding how stress can cause major problems in pets.

To view the online seminar, e-mail [cevausk@ceva.com](mailto:cevausk@ceva.com). After viewing it, delegates have the opportunity to gain CPD certificates and five AMTRA points by filling in the accompanying questionnaire.

The company has also launched a new short film and eye-catching marketing material to provide pet owners with practical advice on how to look after their dogs and cats during the party fireworks season. The film can be viewed at [www.adaptil.co.uk](http://www.adaptil.co.uk).

For further information about the webinar or the marketing support materials, visit [www.feliway.co.uk](http://www.feliway.co.uk) or contact your local Ceva territory manager.

