

West Lakeland Veterinary Group

Is your pet frightened of fireworks?

At this time of year, we're all looking forward to cosy evenings in front of the fire as the dark nights draw in, but what does this mean for our pets?

Although it seems a long way off, Bonfire Night will be here sooner than some of our pets would like. Horrid loud bangs and flashes can cause upset to our pets. This is why West Lakeland Veterinary Group would like to work with owners to ensure our patients are able to keep as calm and relaxed as possible.

What can you do?

* Supply your pet with a 'basecamp'. Somewhere to go, to relax and hide away. Do not disturb your pet whilst they are in their 'camp'. If your pet already has a bed area, try adding a large blanket over the top to help darken it and provide more security.



- * Do not reassure your pet. As mean as you may feel, reassuring your pet during a stressful period actually confirms to them that there is a reason to be worried. If you act as normal as possible (or even ignore your pet completely) during these times, it communicates to your pet that you are not upset by the noises and that they shouldn't be either.
- * Provide a different background noise. Often having the television or radio on can minimise the effect of the firework noises. If you chose to play music, having a tune with a strong background beat will help mask the banging noise further.
- * Do not allow your pets outside during the active firework period. Walking dogs or letting cats outside can cause panic and confusion for your pets. Ensure all windows and doors are kept closed. Is your pet micro-chipped? Lost pet reports increase at this time of year as panicked animals run away from the noises.
- * Some animals can display unwanted behaviour when very stressed. This can result in vocalisation, defecation or destructive behaviour. As unwanted as these behaviours are, please remember not to punish or 'tell off' your pet.
- * Plan ahead and buy your pet a new toy or play a game with them during the noisy times as a distraction.
- * Ensure all family members are aware of your 'pet calming plan'. It will work better if the whole household knows the rules to follow to help your pet through this stressful time.

What can West Lakeland Veterinary Group do?

In years gone past, sedation was thought to be the best way to control an animal during this time of year. However, recent research has shown that this doesn't work to give the animal the best benefit.

Nowadays, the best method for helping our animals involves 'desensitisation'. This means that, over a long period of time, slowly introducing the animal to the scary environment/noise/phobia until they become used to, and accept, that they are not in any danger.

How do we do this?

- * **Audio stimulation:** There are various CDs available which play different sounds that typically upset animals: Traffic: Animal Calls; and our old friend, fireworks.

You can play these CDs, quietly at first, eventually getting loudly until clearly audible and your pet not worrying. Call your West Lakeland Vet Branch to enquire further or order your CD.

* Over-the-counter medications are now available to help combat stress in animals without needing to see a vet. During weaning, a mother animal can give off pheromones which their young pick up on to enable them to bond and communicate. Tablets, collars, sprays and diffusers allow manufactured versions of these pheromones to help settle adult animals in nervous situations. Speak with your Veterinary Nurse to find the best product for you and your pet.



These methods take a long time to 'kick in' and benefit the animal, so starting at the earliest opportunity is the best way to success for November 5th!