

MEDICAL MANAGEMENT

Some cats and dogs will require the use of medicinal preparations to help with management of their noise phobias. These include:

Diffusers, sprays, collars and tablets containing a synthetic copy of a pheromone found in dogs and cats which soothes and reassures

Complimentary feed additives - derived from casein, a molecule found in milk which may help promote relaxation

Prescription medications – including mild sedatives and anxiety relieving agents.

All of these products are designed to be used in conjunction with behavioural therapy so please speak to someone at the surgery for advice before you start to use them.



Summary

- Noise phobias are common in pets
- As owners, our well-meaning attempts to alleviate a pet's fear may actually make the situation worse
- Desensitisation is the best long-term control, but takes time and patience, so must be started well in advance of any anticipated noisy event



XLVets Small Animal member veterinary practices work together to share experience, knowledge and ideas to ensure the highest levels of quality and care for their client's pets. XLVet member practices provide a compassionate and caring service for all pets and at the same time offer comprehensive and up-to-date treatment in all fields of veterinary medicine and surgery.



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MANAGING NOISE PHOBIAS



A phobia is defined as an extreme fear or aversion to something. In pets the most common phobias are associated with loud or sudden noises such as thunder, fireworks and gunshots.

Regardless of whether your pet lives in the town or the countryside it will at some stage in its life be exposed to loud or unpleasant noises.

For some this can be an extremely frightening experience and as a result they may develop severe aversions to certain noises. These responses may be so extreme that the animal may require retraining to modify their behaviour and learn to accept the noise more readily.

WHAT TO DO...

1. Recognise that your pet has a noise phobia
2. Behave appropriately towards your pet when they are afraid or anxious
3. Desensitise them to the sounds they are afraid of

How can I tell if my pet is afraid or anxious?

The list below gives some examples of signs our pets can show when they are unhappy or frightened:

- Cowering
- Shivering
- Shaking as if it has just come out of water
- Hiding
- Restlessness or hyperactivity i.e. pacing or fidgeting
- Chewing (especially items they should not be chewing including furniture and door frames etc.)
- Whining and/or barking
- Toileting in the house (with cats, not using the litter tray)
- Drooling
- Panting
- Eating or drinking more than normal
- Digging in the house
- Tail chasing
- Jumping on you or the furniture
- Excessive grooming

Managing your pet during a noise event

CATS AND DOGS

- Keep them indoors, remember to lock cat flaps
- Create some low grade background noise as a distraction using the television or radio
- Avoid fussing, cuddling or reassuring your pet while it is scared. This only tells your pet there is something to be scared about! Stay relaxed, act normally, praise calm behaviour and ignore the noises yourself
- If your pet is responsive, encourage your pet to play to distract them during the events
- NEVER deliberately walk your dog during a noise event. Try and choose times of day to walk when shooting is less likely such as early mornings and keep them on a lead
- Make sure they have access to a place where they can hide safely if they want to. A "safe area" can be created using an old box or crate – speak to our nurses for advice with this
- Avoid leaving your pet alone during upsetting events. If you do leave the house, don't get angry with them if they have been destructive after being left on their own



SMALL PETS

- Give your pet extra bedding to burrow into so that it feels safe
- Hutches, cages and enclosures should be brought into a quiet room indoors or a garage or shed. If they are too large to be moved consider covering the hutch with a thick blanket or old duvet to block out the sights and sounds



BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

As with most problems, prevention is better than cure. It is important that from an early age, as much as possible can be done to help your pet associate loud noises with pleasant experiences such as a favourite game, chew toy or activity. These activities should be presented to your pet every time there are noisy events regardless of whether they seem stressed or not.

Sound desensitisation is a key part of training your dog to accept previously unpleasant noises. This approach to behaviour modification can be very rewarding but does require a time and effort to achieve success. Staff at the surgery will be happy to advise you on how to get started and if necessary put you in contact with a pet behaviourist.

Pre-recorded CD's with a range of unpleasant noises can be obtained through your practice. However, they should only be used in conjunction with competent behavioural advice as part of a regulated desensitisation programme.