

## *Storm or Noise Phobia*

Fear of thunderstorms and other noises, such as fireworks, can cause extreme anxiety in pets. Their anxiety is real and should not be treated lightly. Without proper care, their fear will worsen with time and exposure. Signs of fear include: body crouched, hiding, tail tucked, shaking, panting, or salivating. Severe cases have lead to animals chewing through walls to escape, jumping through windows, and experiencing respiratory and/or cardiac arrest.

### *Did you know?*

Approximately 70% of patients with storm or noise phobia also have separation anxiety.

Dogs that react to storms may not be reacting to the noise alone: stimuli could include other sounds (wind, rain), darkness, changes in light intensity, barometric pressure changes, etc.

### *What can you do?*

First, do not send contradictory signals to your pet. Dogs feel rewarded for fearful behavior when you pet and praise them when they are fearful. Instead, speak in a normal voice or sit quietly next to them *without* petting them. Second, do not be tense during storms. Be upbeat. Your pet will pick up on your emotions and body language.

Provide a quiet sheltered refuge for your pet when storms are expected. Determine what makes your pet feel safe (bathroom, closet, crate, under a blanket, etc).

Try a DAP (dog appeasing pheromone) diffuser, spray or collar. This can help reduce signs in a large percentage of pets and is both safe and easy to try.

Try a Thundershirt.

Try supplements aimed at reducing anxiety such as Solliquin. Please do NOT try any new products without discussing with your veterinarian first.

For pets that are frightened by pressure changes, the storm defender cape has proven very effective. See [www.stormdefender.com](http://www.stormdefender.com)

Try "Alexa, open calm my dog (or cat)". Or try "Alexa, open relax my dog". Note these are 'skill's that have to be enabled but are free with your Alexa device.

For pets that are fearful of noise, it is helpful to play an audiotape (such as Sounds Scary) of a thunderstorm (*not* during an actual storm). Start at a barely audible level, and reward your pet when they are calm. Gradually (over a period of weeks), increase the volume until your pet no longer reacts fearfully to the sounds. Only reward your pet when they are calm/confident. If they react anxiously, wait about 1 minute to see if they habituate to the new level and relax. If your pet does not relax, ignore the anxious behavior and decrease the volume to the previous level and reward the relaxed behavior. Always end on a positive note when you are performing these exercises. During the non-storm season, work with your pet for 5-10 minutes each day. Keep a diary of your pet's progress.

Initially, medication is often essential for improvement. Options may included Trazodone, Alprazolam, or Sileo (a gel). An anti-anxiety medication is most appropriate. Your veterinarian can work with you to determine the best one for your pet. (In the past, veterinarians have used Acepromazine, which scrambles perceptions and can make them more sensitive to noise. In doing so, this can actually make your scared pet feel worse. Behaviorists discourage the use of this drug for anxiety.) Once your pet learns storms are nothing to fear, they may be gradually weaned off the medication. Medication alone is not recommended without appropriate behavior therapy.

For more information see: [www.lowstresshandling.com](http://www.lowstresshandling.com) and [www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com)