

What causes fear of storms?

It is unknown why animals become afraid of noises, in many cases this fear can turn into a phobia. Storm phobias are more commonly seen in dogs. Animals, unlike humans cannot rationalise or comprehend certain situations; it is because of this they create fears and anxieties.

It is not only the noise factor that produces these phobias, but also the visual element, which can include the darkening of the sky, clouds and the lightning. The smell element is one not often thought of, an animal having a greater sense of smell to our own, it can indicate to an animal that something is changing, which to them can be alarming. Animals can also detect the changes in atmospheric pressure, which is why many dogs can predict when a storm is coming.

Storm season

Storm phobias usually only worsen with exposure, this rate depends on the animal and the unpredictability of the storms. The storm season usually runs through the summer months, however can occur throughout the year.

Our pets are very aware of the mental state of their owners. If you are worried or nervous, this will add to the pets fear. Your pet will look to you for direction, so keep an upbeat and in charge attitude .



For more information on medications and pheromones contact:

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STORM PHOBIAS



Signs of storm phobia

Different animals may display different signs of noise phobias, these may include:

- Hiding (mostly seen in cats)
- Chewing
- Panting/drooling/pacing
- Trying to escape (digging, jumping through windows over fences, running away)
- Trembling/shaking, seeking out owners
- Vocalizing (barking or meowing)
- Not listening to commands



The fear of loud noises is triggered by what is called the orienting response, which is the brains mechanism for being aware. When the animal hears certain sounds, the brain instantly processes them to determine whether or not they might signal danger.

How to help prevent storm phobias

There is no cure for storm phobias, but there are ways that you can reduce the **fear**.

- Shelter them from the noise, placing them inside or in a protected room or cage, where the noise and sounds are not as threatening, leaving them out to cope on their own will only make the situation worse. Turning on the TV or radio may aid in blocking out some of the noise. Closing windows and curtains will also help to block out light and noise.
- When fear is shown, do not comfort, this is showing the animal that the noise should be feared, and can make the problem worse. Instead try to distract them with a game and reward them for the good behaviour instead of the fearful behaviour.
- Thunder is a predictable noise in which you can prepare your dog for. Most occur in the afternoons or evenings, so target your strategies for those times of the day. Locking your animals up in advance as well as pre-organising games or other distractions.
- Exercise will help to tire the animal, both mentally and physically, the exercise can also act as a mild sedative and may make them less responsive to the noise.
- Punishment is not the solution; this will only produce more fear as they relate the noise with the punishment.

Medications used for noise Phobias

If fears are dealt with early on then the need for medications will decrease. With some animals, this is their only option. Anti-anxiety medications can be prescribed to animals with severe anxiety.

Desensitization

For noise phobias, desensitization teaches the animal to be calm, while the noise levels are low, then the noise is gradually increased. Exposing your animal to the noise of rain, and thunder through sounds CD's and gradually increasing the volume and duration of the sounds can help significantly in reducing the dogs overall level of fear exposure. Doing this at a young age (before 14 weeks) can help to inoculate animals against these noise fears.

Pheromones

In the right situation, pheromones can be quite effective. They work by mimicking the chemicals that are released by animals that can have an effect on the behaviour of the receiving animals, The pheromones put out can relate to familiarisation which may aid in relaxing your animal is stressful or fearful situations.