

Lake Cable Animal Hospital Fear of Storms

Reactions to thunderstorms are common. Most of our dogs will become accustomed to the noises produced during a storm, but others can become fearful. The anxiety is related to what the dog feels is a threat. The bigger the threat the more anxious the dog becomes.

Panting, trembling, hiding, pacing, whining/barking, drooling, inappropriate soiling, and destructive behaviors are the common signs that can be seen. These symptoms can occur before the storm or during the storm depending on the part of the storm your dog is fearful of.

What can you do for your dog?

Try to avoid the storm stimuli:

- Provide a safe place that is readily available, even when no person is home. Put your dog in a quiet area of the house before the storm occurs. In this area, the sound of thunder and other noises are hopefully muted. These can include a room with no windows, closet, finished basement.
- If the dog is already anxious, allow the dog access to the area that they prefer as long as it is a safe area.
- Mute the noise of the storm with Background “white noise” or music, ear covers (Mutt Muffs), and sound muting cage covers (Thunderhut). Decrease the visual stimuli with eye covers (Doggles).

Change your dog’s perception/response:

- **Desensitization** is when a dog is exposed to the storm’s stimuli at a lesser intensity that will not produce the fear response. How this is done is by playing storm noises at a low level and slowly increasing the volume.
- **Counter-Conditioning** is an attempt to change your dog’s perception of the storm noise away from fear. Instead of fear, we give your dog a different reaction to the storm. When the storm noises are being played at a low volume, you play with your dog, feed your dog treats, do obedience training, use agility or food puzzles or relaxation. By doing this, we change your dog from feeling threatened to a positive response to the storm.

Pheromones, Botanicals, Drugs, Snug shirt

- Pheromones help to decrease anxiety and stress for our pets, similar to aromatherapy for us. Currently there are pheromone collars (worn continuously), plug in diffuser and a spray for the environment (not to be sprayed directly on the pet).
- Nutraceutical or natural products including melatonin, anxiety remedies
- Drugs may be used depending on the severity of your dog’s anxiety. Some of them are short acting and are given before a storm arrives. Other drugs act long term and are given daily.
- Thundershirt, Anxiety Wrap or a snug fitting t-shirt work for some dogs.

If talking calmly, slowly petting your dog, snuggling with your dog or other strategies helps your dog to be more settled, continue this. You are not rewarding the fear but comforting your dog and you are adding something to the experience that allows your dog to cope better.

Don't panic or show your own anxiety before or during a storm, this can increase your dog's anxiety. Never scold or yell at your dog, this will likely increase his anxiety.

Most times we have improvement, rarely a cure and most involve more than one strategy. We can use the pheromones, shirts, botanicals and drugs to decrease the anxiety but we also have to use desensitization and counter-conditioning to help our dogs achieve a better quality of life with us.

Products:

- Storm Sounds
<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/dog-behaviour-health/sound-therapy-for-pets>
Noiseshy Cure System: Thunder/Fireworks
- Pheromones brands include DAP, Adaptil, and Comfort Zone.
- Nutraceutical or natural products include HomeoPet Anxiety Remedy for Pets, Rescue Remedy and others.
- Mutt Muffs
- Thunderhut
- Doogles
- Thundershirt/ Anxiety Wrap
- Music - calming <http://throughadogsear.com> and others

