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Make Fourth of July safe for your pets

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Fourth of July is one of my favorite holidays. It's a great time to be with our family – including the pets. But it's no fun if you have a dog who gets frightened by fireworks. We need to help our canine and feline friends through this potentially traumatic event.

Here are some recommendations to help. If you plan well in advance, you can try to desensitize your dog to loud sounds. This is a process of playing recordings of fireworks or thunder at your home in a calm environment every day at a slightly higher and higher volume. This process can take many months to accomplish and since the Fourth is right around the corner we may need to save that for next year. Here are some tips to help noise-phobic pets enjoy a stress-free Fourth of July. Exercise them well before the evening. Bring them inside early before the action starts. Feed them a small meal. Close all the curtains, windows and blinds. Play some music at a volume that is comfortable, but will help drown out the sound. Put on fans or a white noise machine. If you notice they are frightened and the shaking starts, don't baby them and bring attention to their fear. This only reinforces their behavior. Never reprimand or punish them for this behavior either. Instead act natural and engage them in play. Bring out their favorite toys. Sometimes, even showing them the ball will help distract them. If they are food oriented give periodic treats to keep them occupied. A good chew stick can go a long way.

It is best to plan to stay home with your pets. They will feel much more secure, plus you will be able to make sure they can't jump a fence or dig through a wall. The secret is to keep everything normal and not let them sense your stress.

If you must leave your pets, again make sure they are in a space where the sound will be minimal. They need to be where they cannot hurt themselves, destroy your property or get outdoors. If your dog is crate trained, the crate is the safest place for him to be. It is best to accustom your dog to the crate in advance so that she will feel safe and secure there. Also don't forget the outdoor cats. Please bring them inside before the activities begin!

Make sure all your pets collars are secure, and never leave a choke chain or slip lead on them when you are away. Also, make sure your dog is well identified in case they do escape. I recommend a microchip and a collar with ID tags.

If your pet does have noise phobias, take the time to make an appointment with your vet well in advance of the big holiday. You can discuss the use of medications to help calm them, but not every medication works predictably in every dog. The medications also need to be given so they take effect before the noises start or fear sets in.

Finally, watch out for heat stroke with your pets this year. Keep them indoors in air conditioning on those hot days. If you can't, make sure they have plenty of shade and fresh cold water. Never leave them in a car! Exercise them only during the cool hours, before 9 a.m. and after 7 p.m. Following these steps, should help you and your pet, enjoy a safe and fun-filled Fourth.

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