# **Things That Go Bump in the Night**

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**Things That Go Bump in the Night**Has this situation ever happened to you? It’s a quiet night at home when suddenly your dog starts panting, drooling, and whining. He/she starts pacing around the house, looking for a place to hide. You wonder what is going on. A few minutes later you hear the first rumble of thunder. As the storm rages, you try to comfort your dog. Despite your efforts, he/she is visibly shaken and in distress. Even after the storm has passed, your dog has a difficult time settling down. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence in many households.

Studies have shown that at least 30% of all dogs suffer from some level of noise aversion, but only 40% of pet parents seek help from their veterinarian. The fear can be directed towards storms, fireworks, or any other loud and sudden noise. It can range anywhere from mild anxiety to an extreme phobia in which they become destructive of their surroundings. Most pet parents do their best to comfort their dogs during these events, offering over the counter calming devices and treats. While this is a great start, in many cases these alone are not enough to help ease their pet’s anxiety.

***Environmental Enrichment and Training***One of the most important things you can do is provide a safe place for your pet to retreat to during these times of stress. This could be a closet, bathroom, basement, or wherever he/she feels comfortable. If the area has a window, draw the curtains or blinds to help block the flash of light which is a predictor of the scary sound that follows. Turn the lights on in the room, making the sudden flash of lightning or fireworks less startling. Providing white noise, such as a fan, or music will aid in drowning out the scary sounds. If using music, play songs that have a have strong bass beat as they tend to mask the noises more effectively. Place soft bedding on the floor and bring in toys to make it a more inviting space. Prior to any stressful event, you can help your dog make positive associations with the space by playing or feeding occasional meals in the area. The goal is to teach them that it is a happy and safe place to go to when things become stressful.

Training your dog to relax is also very beneficial. There are many ways to do this, so having professional guidance will set you up for success. An excellent training tool is Through A Dog’s Ear. This is a series of CDs that are tailored to specific sounds your pet may be fearful of. They aid in desensitizing your dog to these noises by presenting the scary sound at a very low decibel, then slowly increasing in volume. All the while you are teaching your dog to remain calm and focused on you. This series includes a training guide full of helpful tips. You can find Through A Dog’s Ear at [positively.com](http://positively.com/).

***Natural and Over the Counter Products***Once the safe place has been established, adding over the counter products can help relax your pet. Thundershirts are an excellent option. This compression vest applies gentle pressure in key places which in turn releases endorphins. The physiological response to these endorphins is relaxation. We encourage our clients to buy the Thundershirt brand name, as opposed to similar products, for several reasons. First, they offer a money back guarantee. If you do not feel it works for your pet, you will receive a full refund. Second, the company donates all returned shirts to shelter pets across the country. Another product proven to reduce anxiety in animals, as well as people, is Lavender. Diffusing pure lavender oil or placing a few drops on the bedding or a Thundershirt can be beneficial. Adaptil, a pheromone product, can also be very useful in decreasing anxiety in dogs. Pheromones are naturally occurring substances in the body that promote relaxation. Adaptil is available in three forms: a spray, a collar, and a plug in diffuser. Calming treats are beneficial because they contain Chamomile, L-Tryptophan, and/or L-Theanine (a green tea extract). These naturally occurring substances also have been proven to help increase relaxation. Many dogs need multiple products to be able to cope with stressful events. In severe cases, dogs will need pharmacological help in addition to these over the counter products.

***The Science of Stress and How Medications Can Help***When exposed to a stressful stimuli, neurons in the brain are activated. Cortisol, commonly referred to as a stress hormone, is released into the body causing blood flow to be shifted to the vital organs. The instincts of fight or flight will kick in as the brain determines the severity of the situation. When they are repeatedly exposed to a stressful stimuli, neurons fire at an abnormally high rate and can remain in that state even after the stimuli is no longer present. Cortisol levels increase over 200% and can stay elevated for at least 40 minutes after the stressful event has passed. This only reinforces your pet’s fear. Fortunately, your veterinarian can help. There is a product that is the first and only FDA approved medication to treat this fear called Sileo. It is a very low dose of a commonly used sedative in veterinary medicine that blocks the neurons from firing. It is easy to administer and starts working in about 10-20 minutes. Other medications can also aid in helping your pet relax. Many of these are classified as anxiolytics, meaning their purpose is to reduce anxiety. These products are available through your veterinarian. It is important to have your pet examined and weighed regularly to be sure any medications your are administering are effective and dosed properly.

At Hillside Animal Hospital, we are devoted to your pet’s physical as well as mental health. If your pet suffers from any form of anxiety, we encourage you to contact us at 314-645-2141. I am happy to provide consultations in which we can discuss your concerns about your pet’s behavior. If needed, we can refer you to excellent trainers as well as a veterinary behavior specialist. Along with our veterinarians, we can devise a plan tailored to your pet’s individual needs. Call us today!

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