

# Prep Your Pets for the Fourth Fireworks

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Much to the consternation of many companion pet parents, many U.S. states are legalizing the sale of fireworks and/or changing the times fireworks can be set off. Indeed, cats and dogs may experience a panic attack to all sudden and loud noises such as fireworks, thunder, alarms, sirens, gunfire and air shows. Of course, others may only react to some of those noises.

Stress signals in dogs include looking away, lip licking, yawning, ears back, “whale eye”, lifting a paw, tail tucking, freezing, urination, vomiting, diarrhea, hiding, or the worst, running away.

What is a pet parent to do during these times of stress? We have a few ideas that may be helpful. Some of them may work or may not work for your dogs or cats.

## **Feed – Don’t Overfeed**

If you are having a backyard barbecue, please ask your family and guests not to indulge your companion dog with snacks or nibbles. While your dog may be able to handle the additional food on other occasions, the noise might induce stress vomiting, diarrhea or even pancreatitis.

You may also want to consider feeding your pet’s dinner earlier than usual. A dog’s gastrointestinal time is usually six to eight hours. If the firework display is set to start around 9:30 PM, think about feeding around 3:30. If you free-feed your dog, consider taking it away earlier in the day.

## **Exercise**

Exercise reduces stress. In fact, one study showed that like humans, dogs had significantly increased endocannabinoid (eCB) signaling following high-intensity endurance running. The argument can be made that eCB signaling is an important regulatory system in the brain that largely functions to buffer against many of the effects of stress. Further, dynamic changes in this system contribute to different aspects of the stress response.

Unfortunately, the study found that eCB signaling does *not* significantly increase following low-intensity walking. But, we have to remember that physical activity can make us and our pets sleepy. Period.

Other ideas may be a game of fetch or a visit to the dog park. Don’t forget to take water for you and your dog.

## **Thundershirt**

Thundershirts – or even a doggy sweater or T-shirt – work for some dogs. We definitely think they are worth checking out since they are non-invasive. However, remember that your dog is wearing clothing during a usually very hot day in most parts of the country. Make sure your house is cool enough so your dog is not panting even before the fireworks and provide plenty of fresh water.

## **Kennel (Crates)**

Some people think kennel crates are cruel because they confine the dog. However, many dogs see them as their personal space within their homes. You want to make sure you get the right kind. Some dogs do not do well in wire kennel crates, but are great in the more solid sided plastic ones. If you have wire, you can toss a blanket over the top, making sure the dog still gets enough air. It should be a cozy environment and not too big or too small. A dog should be able to stand up, turn around and stretch.

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## Lavender

Spread lavender sachets, aroma spray, or the essential oil around your house that is out of your pet's reach. You also can put a dab of the oil on the nose and behind each ear.

## Turkey and Fish

Turkey is rich in tryptophan, an essential amino acid that acts as a natural sedative. So, you may want to start turkey a week or two before the Fourth of July to transition them correctly. Note that fish like cod is also high in tryptophan. However, if your dog or cat has a food sensitivity or intolerance to turkey or fish, these foods are not an option. (Sorry!)

## Petting

Have your dog or cat initiate contact with you first. But, don't avoid their requests if you are busy during stressful times like firework displays. Studies suggest that dogs prefer to be petted on their chests and behind their ears. This is true, but you know your dog best.

## Over-the-Counter Calming Supplements & Treats

You can definitely try these, but please research first. Talk to your locally owned and operated pet food store, visit forums and chatrooms online, and get tips from your friends. Again, all of these people may swear by a product that works for their dogs, but may not work for yours.

If your dog is prone to seizures, please avoid products that contain rosemary and oregano. Both are considered neurotoxins and commonly found in dog foods and treats as a natural preservative. Fennel and sage should also be avoided.

Additionally, do not go beyond the recommended dosage.

## Prescriptions

If everything else has not worked in the past, talk to your veterinarian about possible prescriptions. This should literally be your last resort.

## References

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