

# THUNDERSTORM PHOBIA

By Dawn Burke, DVM

Thunderstorm phobia is a common problem in dogs. The phobia tends to worsen with age and dogs seem to learn the behavior from one another. Dogs may react to the sound of thunder, lightning, wind, rain, change in barometric pressure, or a combination of all or some of these. Because of the many factors involved it can be very difficult to desensitize a dog with thunderstorm phobia.

Tapes/CD's of thunderstorms have been used in attempt to desensitize the thunderstorm phobic dog. They should be played during the non-thunderstorm season at a volume that causes no reaction from the dog. Reward calm behavior with food treats and gradually increase the volume. Your veterinarian can help you with the program. While many dogs can be desensitized to the tapes/cd's, it does not transfer well to actual storms for many dogs, usually because the dog is reacting to more cues than just the thunder (lightning, change in barometric pressure, etc).

There are things you can do to help your cope with thunderstorm phobia. be careful not to reward the by comforting or reassuring when he is acting fearful. this as approval of their worsen the behavior. Punishing, cheerful. Punishing, with the dog will only make the situation worse. Instead, try teaching your dog games like hide and seek with you, or hiding tasty food treats and having him search for them. Practice during the non-storm season so your dog understands the game, then try to engage him in the game when he starts acting nervous about the storm. Dogs that are ball crazy can play with their favorite ball during storms. He should see the ball only sporadically in good weather for short periods of time to keep his interest up and to keep him from associating the ball

with thunderstorms. Pets that are food motivated can be given a Kong that has been stuffed with low fat peanut butter or low fat cream cheese and frozen. Again, on occasion he needs to see these treats when it is not thundering.

Give your dog a safe haven. Some dogs will look for a "den". Dogs that are crate trained may feel more secure in their

crate. Some will go to closets, bathrooms, or the basement. Look for the site your dog has chosen as a safe haven. Try giving a Kong in the safe haven.

Some dogs are calmer when swaddled like a baby. The Anxiety Wrap or a snug t-shirt can be used to have this effect on your dog. Remember to put these on the dogs on good days also so they do not associate them only with storms.

There are many natural products that claim to help dogs with times of anxiety. Dog-appeasing pheromone (DAP), which is available as a diffuser or a collar, may help some dogs. Some dogs seem to improve when given melatonin. As with any product, discuss these with your veterinarian before using them.

There are also a wide variety of drugs that your Veterinarian can prescribe for thunderstorms. Please make sure you discuss both the pros and cons of these drugs with your Veterinarian. For example, many veterinarians will prescribe tranquilizers that sedate the dog. The problem is that most of the time owners are not able to get the drug into the dog far enough in advance to help with the storm phobia, and then the dog is sedated for hours. One must use these drugs with caution in the senior pet.

A veterinary behavior specialist should evaluate dogs that react so severely to storms they are in danger of injuring themselves or destroying property. The specialist can assist in developing a desensitization program and prescribe medication to help the dog with severe thunderstorm phobia.



dog

First,

behavior

your dog

Dogs interpret

actions and can

Try being upbeat and

yelling, or getting upset