

Fourth of July Dog Safety Checklist

A calm, science-based plan for a dog who is frightened of fireworks.

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— IF FIREWORKS ARE TONIGHT

The *five-minute* plan

- Secure ID.** Put a current tag on your dog and confirm the microchip is registered. The Fourth is the top night of the year for lost dogs.
- Build a safe room.** Most interior room you have, windows closed, curtains drawn, fan or white noise running to soften the booms.
- Call your vet.** Ask whether a fast-acting calming medication can still be filled today, and exactly how early to give it.
- Final potty break before dark.** On a harness and leash, before any fireworks start. After that, outside is dangerous.
- Stay with your dog.** Do not leave a frightened dog alone tonight. Your calm presence is part of the treatment.
- Comfort freely.** You cannot reinforce fear with comfort. Pet, soothe, and let your dog lean on you as much as they need.

— BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING ELSE

Severity *at a glance*

MILD

Normal startle

Flinches at a boom, then settles in seconds on their own. Still eats and follows you around.

Do: Stay relaxed, carry on, treat after booms. Light counter-conditioning is plenty.

MODERATE

Anxiety

Pacing, panting, clingy, trembling on and off. Hides but reachable. Settles slowly with help.

Do: Safe room, sound masking, comfort. Start the protocol after the holiday; ask vet about meds.

SEVERE / PANIC

True phobia

Escape attempts, won't eat, drooling, dilated pupils, indoor accidents, or shutdown. Fear that won't stop.

Do: Secure exits, never leave alone, get a vet meds plan, bring in a professional.

When in doubt, plan one level up. If your dog sits between two categories, prepare for the more severe one.

— THE HIGHEST-RISK NIGHT OF THE YEAR

Escape *prevention*

- Leash on before any door opens.** Every door, every gate, every time, even for a quick step outside.
- Baby gate as an airlock.** Put a gate between your dog and exterior doors, so there are two barriers to the open night.
- Block the dog door.** Lock or board it over for the evening. A panicked dog pushes straight through and keeps running.
- Brief your guests.** Tell everyone, including kids, not to open exterior doors without checking where the dog is.
- Walk the fence line before dark.** Check every latch, loose board, and dig spot. Lock gates that are normally just closed.
- Harness for the final potty break.** A well-fitted harness, not just a collar, on a short leash. A second person at the door helps.
- Layer your ID.** Tag, microchip, and a GPS tracker on the harness for severe cases: three ways home.

— AVOID THESE

What *not* to do during fireworks

- ✗ **Do not crate a dog who panics in a crate.** A closed crate becomes a trap that can cause injury. Use an open safe room.
- ✗ **Do not force your dog outside.** It teaches that the outdoors is dangerous and raises the risk of bolting.
- ✗ **Do not scold or punish the fear.** Barking, pacing, and trembling are panic, not disobedience. Correction adds fear to fear.
- ✗ **Do not use shock, prong, or choke corrections.** They teach your dog that fireworks now predict pain too. Next year is worse.
- ✗ **Do not leave a panicking dog alone.** Isolation intensifies fear and raises the odds of a destructive escape.
- ✗ **Do not start sound training during active fireworks.** Real fireworks are far over threshold and sensitize the fear.

— BRING THIS TO YOUR VET, TWO TO FOUR WEEKS AHEAD

Questions *for your veterinarian*

- How long before fireworks do I give it, and how long does it last?
- Can we do a test dose on a quiet day to confirm my dog tolerates it and fine-tune the dose?
- Can I give a second dose if the night runs long, and how much?
- Any contraindications with my dog's other medications or health conditions?
- What is the plan if the first medication does not work?
- Is event-only medication enough, or does my dog need daily anti-anxiety support too?
- What does a good response look like, and what are the warning signs of a bad reaction?

Ask about alternatives to **acepromazine used alone**. Current guidance has moved away from it for fear, because it can leave a dog sedated while still frightened.

— THE MORNING AFTER

Helping your dog *recover*

- Keep the day quiet.** No big outings, visitors, or training drills. Let the nervous system settle.
- Offer a calm sniff walk** in a familiar, quiet place. Skip busy areas and the dog park.
- Ask little of your dog** for a day or two. A stressed brain learns poorly and frustrates easily.
- Watch appetite and elimination.** A skipped meal or loose stool is common; call the vet if it lasts beyond a day.
- Watch for fear spreading** to new sounds, like distant traffic or a closing door.
- Write down what happened** and what helped. It is gold for your vet and for planning next year.
- If there was true panic**, contact a behavior professional now, while the night is fresh.

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This checklist is for education and does not replace veterinary or behavioral care for your individual dog. Always consult your veterinarian about your dog's health and any medication.