

Noise Phobia in Dog

Ballamwar, V. A.¹, Bonde, S. W.², Mangle, N. S.³ and Vyavahare, S. H.⁴

Department of Veterinary Physiology and Veterinary Biochemistry,
Post Graduate Institute of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Akola.

Abstract

Fear of thunderstorms and other forms of noise phobia are common problems in dogs. Administering medications along with changing the pet's environment, and using behavior modification techniques can help ease the fear. Above all, do not give your pet any attention or reward when he is showing signs of fear; this will only reinforce the fearful behavior.

Keywords: Noise Phobia, Dog, Pet, Medication, Behaviour, Environment, Fear.

Events associated with the danger can cause fear in pets. Fear can soon become a phobia. Phobia is a disproportionate fear to the danger of the real situation. Phobia is defined as a persistence, excessive and irrational fear response to the situation.

Causes of noise phobia

Noise phobia in dogs can be caused by gunshots, firecrackers, thunderstorms and even the sound of birds. For example, the events associated with the thunderstorms such as a change in barometric pressure, lightning, electrostatic disturbances, and even smells associated with the storms can cause noise phobia in dogs. In almost all instances, the fear of noises and storms escalates, worsening with each exposure. Soon the pet may become fearful of similar sounds or events associated with the noise. A dog afraid of gunshots may show fear at the mere sight of a hunting rifle or a pet afraid of thunder may also become afraid of rain.

Signs of noise phobia

Dogs may display different signs of noise phobias which include: Hiding (most common sign in cats), urinating, defecating, chewing, panting, pacing, trying to escape (digging, jumping through windows or going through walls, running away), drooling, seeking the owner, expressing anal glands, off feed, not listening to commands, trembling or shaking, dilated pupils, vocalizing (barking or meowing).

Dogs with mild noise phobia become anxious, trembles, hide during thunderstorms and be afraid of to go out of door for hours even after the storms has passed. The mild noise phobia needs a treatment because generally phobia becomes worst with repeated exposure.

Treatment of noise phobia

There is no guarantee that a noise phobia can be totally resolved, but in many instances the fear can be managed effectively. The effectiveness of treatment depends on a number of factors including the severity of the phobia; how long the pet has had it; whether it is ongoing, seasonal, or unpredictable; and the amount of time the owner is willing to commit to the behavior modification techniques. Commonly used medicines:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Diazepam | 2. Clorazepate |
| 3. Alprazolam | 4. Amitriptyline |
| 5. Clomipramine | 6. Fluoxetine |

Drs. Dodman and Aronson then gave the melatonin to dogs and produced the result. Aronson used a dose of 3mg for a 35-100 lb dog. Smaller dogs get 1.5 mg, and larger dogs may get 6mg.

Homeopathic remedies: 1. Phosphorous PHUS 30C
2. Aconitum Napellus 30C.

Phosphorous PHUS 30C - Drop 3 to 5 pellets down the back of the dog's throat (do not touch the pellets with your hand) every fifteen minutes until you start to see results. Then stop. You can resume giving the pellets if the dog starts to get agitated again. If Phosphorous does not seem to work, during the next storm try Aconitum Napellus 30C. Administer it in the same manner.

Change in environment: By changing the environment of the animal during the storm or noise, the anxiety level can be reduced. Changing the environment may reduce the volume level of the sound or help make the pet less aware of it.

Increase vigorous exercise: The pet should receive vigorous exercise daily and more so on a day when the fear-producing noise is likely to occur. The exercise will help to tire the animal, both mentally and physically,

1. M. V. Sc. Scholar, Deptt. of Vety. Physiology.
3. Prof. & Head of Deptt. of Vety. Biochemistry.

2. Head of Deptt. of Vety. Physiology.
4. M. V. Sc. Scholar, Deptt. of Biochemistry.

and may make her less responsive to the noise. In addition, exercise has the effect of increasing natural serotonin levels, which can act as a sedative.

Project a calm attitude: Pets are very aware of the mental state of their owners. If you are worried or nervous, this will add to the pet's fear. Your pet will look to you for direction, so keep an "upbeat" and "in charge" attitude.

Maintain good health and nutrition: Health problems may increase the stress level of pets, and increase their anxiety. For instance, a dog in pain because of hip dysplasia may be more irritable and prone to other behavior changes. Diets too high in protein have been linked to some behavioral problems. Consult your veterinarian if you would like advice about changing your pet's diet.

Behavior modification: Special techniques can be used to help change the animal's response to the noise.

Counterconditioning: Using counterconditioning, the animal is taught to display an acceptable behavior rather than an unacceptable one as a response to a certain stimulus. In this way, a negative stimulus can become associated with a positive event. For instance, the only time the pet gets his most favorite treat, game, or toy, is just prior to and during a thunderstorm. Dogs who enjoy traveling may be taken for a car ride, or cats who love catnip, may be given their favorite catnip mouse. (Dogs who enjoy swimming will need to wait inside until the storm is over!) After a time, the pet will start associating an oncoming storm with getting to have his favorite thing.

Desensitization: Using desensitization, the animal's response is decreased while he is exposed to increasing levels of the fear-producing stimulus. For noise phobias, the animal is taught to be calm when the noise level is low, and then the noise level is gradually increased. This process is generally more successful in dogs than cats. To desensitize a pet to thunderstorms:

1. Obtain a commercial tape or CD of a storm, or tape record one yourself (commercial products generally work better). Play the recording at normal volume to determine if it will induce the fear response. If it does, continue with the desensitization; if not, you will need to obtain a different recording. For some animals, a recording alone may not work, since there may be a combination of occurrences that provokes fear, e.g.; thunder plus lightning or changes in barometric pressure. For these animals, darkening the room and adding strobe lights may more closely mimic the storm, and may need to be included in the desensitization process.
2. Play the recording at a volume low enough that the pet is aware of the sound, but it does not induce a

fear response. For instance, the ears may be cocked towards the source of the sound, but you still have the pet's attention. In some instances, that may mean the pet needs to be in a different room from where the recording is playing. While the recording is playing at the low level, engage the pet in an activity in which you give the commands, such as obedience training or performing tricks. Give food or other rewards during the activity when the pet accomplishes what he is supposed to. If the animal shows signs of fear, stop and try again the next day, playing the recording at an even lower level. It is important that the pet not be rewarded while he is fearful or anxious. Sessions should last about 20 minutes.

3. If the animal does not respond fearfully, during the next session, increase the volume slightly. Again, involve the pet in an activity and reward it for obeying commands. Continue increasing the volume gradually for each session. If the pet starts to show fear, decrease the volume. Repeat the sessions in various rooms of the house and with various family members present.

4. When the pet does not show fear when the recording is played at a loud volume, you may want to try playing the recording for a short time while you are absent. Gradually increase the time you are gone while the recording is playing.

5. When the pet appears to have lost his fear, the sessions can be reduced to one per week. In most instances, these sessions will need to be repeated weekly for the life of the pet.

6. During an actual storm, use the same activities and rewards you used in the training sessions.

To increase the chances of successful desensitization, the training process should take place during a time of the year when the actual noise will not be encountered: if the pet is afraid of thunder or fireworks, try desensitization during the winter; if afraid of gunshots, the training should take place outside of the hunting season. In most instances, it is best to discontinue any behavior-modifying medications during the desensitization process. Consult with your veterinarian before discontinuing any medications.

References

1. Crowell-Davis Sharon L., et.al. (2003): *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 222(6):744-748.
2. Dodman, N.H., Linda Aronson (2000): *The Whole Dog Journal*.3(5).
3. McCobb, E. C., E. A. Brown, K. Damiani, N. H. Dodman (2001): *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association*. 37(4):319-24.
4. Overall, K. L., A. E. Dunham, D. Frank (2001): *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 219(4):467-73.
5. Rogerson, J. (1997): *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*. 52: 291-297.