

Fear of Thunderstorms

Many dogs in the Midwest are afraid of thunderstorms. Maybe a dog was left alone during a bad storm and did not know where to go or what to do. It may be genetic, or it may be something that has been increasing over the years. Whatever the cause, thunderstorm phobia is very common and can range from mild to severe. There is help for your dog. Help is in the form of a plan to teach them to be calm with the help of antianxiety medication as determined by your veterinarian.



Thunderstorms have a lot of signals going on hours before the storm starts. Sensing the change in air pressure, wind speed, smell, humidity, and temperature changes stimulates fear in the dog. They associate these changes with the impending storm. It is really difficult to mimic these events to train the dog to be calm during them. A dog may learn to be less anxious to the sound of thunder by using a recording, but all the other things cause as much fear as the noise. So the dog may be a little less fearful, but not much by training alone.

When your pet is young do train them to be rewarded for calm, non-anxious behavior during a storm. Have a tornado drill on non-storm days running into the bathroom, calling your pet in quickly and give them a yummy treat. Teach them to go down the basement stairs on command and reward them. Give them a bed, crate or in the bath tub to lie on and reward them for going there fast and lying calmly. Heavy beat rock music or Egyptian/Indian music is very helpful also. [Butterscotch's play list](#) has suggested songs that have helped many dogs. Adaptil collars are also helpful to reduce fear.

For the dogs that are pacing, panting, drooling, circling, howling, pawing at their owners, climbing on to furniture, hiding under the bed, in the closet, digging out of doors or windows there is help for them. There are different levels of fear, and each level causes some physical pain. The dog may not be completely fearless in storms, but they can be calmer, which is much better for them.

Proper anti-anxiety medication (not just tranquilizers) on storm days or through the season are very effective. These medications are not sedatives, although sedatives may be part of combination treatment in severe cases. Your dog will not be constantly drugged out. A check up and blood check are needed before starting treatment. Many dogs that have been on medications through a storm season needed significantly less meds or even none at all the next season.

A plan to help your pet have a better storm season is possible with the help of a veterinarian and staff offering behavioral help. Helping your dog will also help you.

- written by Dr. Sally J. Foote