



Celebrating Safely: Feline Firework Preparedness

While fireworks are enjoyed by many humans, most cats are frightened by the unexpected and overwhelming noise. Unfortunately, we can't explain to them they're not in danger! While we may not all be able to pack up and head out of town for firework-heavy holidays, there are still many things we can do to help our cats stay safe and sane when they occur.

Cats have wide-ranging reactions to fireworks, from mild to severe:

Overt Signs of Fear/Stress

Hiding/retreating
Hissing
Yowling/growling
Puffed hair (piloerection)
Shaking/trembling

Subtle Signs of Fear/Stress

Large "blown" pupils
Tense crouched body
Moving with body lowered
Noise sensitivity/flinching
Ears held back or flattened

While the behaviors in the severe fear column might seem the most concerning, we don't want to ignore the milder fear behaviors. *Cats can experience what's known as "trigger stacking,"* where small stressors add up to *bigger than normal reactions*. Fireworks on their own might only worry your cat, but combine that with a house party, and the stress might cause them to, for example, swat at or bite you or a guest when they would have otherwise just moved away.

Because of this, we recommend preparing in advance so that when the big day finally arrives, you and everyone in your living space already knows what to do to help your cat feel safer and more comfortable. Every cat is different, so you'll want to tailor your approach to your cat's individual needs. Want help from a professional? [You can set up a free behavior helpline with our certified trainers at this link!](#)

How you can prepare for fireworks

- **Make sure your cat's identification is up to date.** This means secure tags, collars, and most especially microchips. If your cat gets lost, a microchip with up-to-date information is the most reliable way for you to be contacted.
- **Explore behavior medication: ASAP!** If you know your cat is highly noise-sensitive generally or sensitive to fireworks already, you may want to speak to your vet or a vet behaviorist about behavior medication. These medications can help mitigate some of the more extreme effects of noise-related fear. *We recommend reaching out to a vet well in advance*, not only to avoid the rush, but because most vets recommend doing a trial run to make sure the dosage is correct before using it on the big day. Gabapentin is the most commonly prescribed medication.
- **Prepare a "sanctuary area."** Having a safe space to hide and sleep can make all the difference for your cat. Better yet, provide a couple of options for your dog to choose from. Examples include:
 - A cozy crate with some plush blankets and a blanket covering to dampen noise/visuals
 - Under a bed set up with bedding and some enrichment, or a comforter thrown over a chair
 - A closet set up for your cat to hide in, a dark room with the shades closed (may prevent flashes of light, depending on where you are located)
- **Add background noise/dampening.** Dampen the sound of the noise preventatively. Keep a fan on, play gentle radio, classical music, or white noise in the background. Having a baseline of background noise can make louder noises less startling.
- **Keep your cat indoors if at all possible.** In the noise and confusion, even outdoor cats who know their neighborhoods can panic and get lost. Make sure ALL WINDOWS AND DOORS ARE CLOSED. Cats can fit through openings three inches wide!
- **Offer enrichment.** Lick mats with wet treats can be calming if your cat is interested in food. If your cat likes to blow off nervous energy through play, active toys or paper balls stuffed with dry treats can be a good option. It may be that your cat will be too stressed to eat, but we recommend having the option available. See our *Feline Enrichment* handout for tips!
- **Comfort your cat--if they seek comfort!** It is a myth that you can "reinforce fear" by offering your cat comfort during fearful moments. We are and should be sources of comfort for our cats, especially in scary moments! However *we do want to make sure that comfort in that moment will actually make the cat feel better*. For some cats, being held/petted while they are stressed *can actually make them feel confined and cornered*. Happily there is an easy way to tell. Offer your cat some interaction (petting/stroking/scratches), then stop, and see if they reengage. If they do, great! Continue! But if they don't engage, respect their decision to end the interaction. See our *Consent Checks* handout for tips!

For more information or to request behavior assistance, visit eastbayspca.org/behavior.

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