



WINTER 2009

# Westgate Veterinary Hospital

www.westgateevets.com

# NEWS

## Testing times...

Whilst a thorough clinical examination may allow us to identify your pet's problem, there are lots of things that we can't diagnose without further investigation. Laboratory tests are one very useful way of investigating problems:

- **Urine samples** – can give us a large amount of information concerning the general health of your pet and may flag up conditions such as kidney disease and sugar diabetes (diabetes mellitus).
- **Blood Samples** – blood cells, proteins and enzymes can be rapidly evaluated to give information about a range of diseases including those affecting the liver, kidneys, bowel, bone and blood cells, as well as indicators of infection. Blood samples can be taken to look for heart disease, hormone conditions, infections and even cancer.
- **Swabs** – can be taken from diseased areas so that the bacteria and cells present can be examined under a microscope.
- **Tissue Samples** – to get more information about diseased structures on a cellular level, samples of the tissues involved may need to be examined under a microscope. This can be achieved by simply sucking cells out of a diseased area with a needle and syringe (a fine needle aspirate), or by surgically cutting out a sample of tissue (a biopsy). This gives us information about the disease process involved, how best to treat it and what kind of outcome to expect. As you can see, laboratory tests can give us a huge amount of additional information and having this level of knowledge enables us to do the best for your pet!



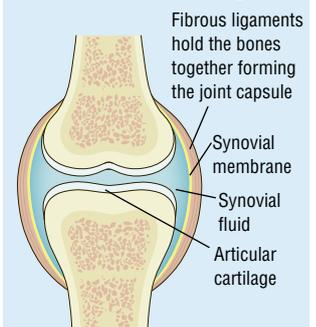
## Arthritis alert!



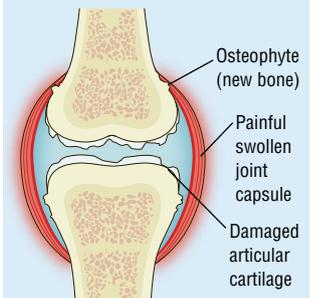
WINTER is here, and just like us, our pets can suffer from arthritis. It is a common problem in pets and may initially go unnoticed as it is often gradual in onset. It is usually worse in the colder months, causing a variety of symptoms including pain, stiffness – particularly after rest, and reluctance to play. The joints permitting free movements are called synovial joints. A healthy joint has a smooth layer of articular cartilage covering the ends of the bones and is lubricated by synovial fluid produced by the synovial membrane, allowing friction free movement. Arthritic joints typically show a progressive breakdown and thinning of the articular cartilage. As the cartilage wears, so pets suffer from pain and inflammation of the joint. On x-rays, new bone can often be seen around the affected joint.

There are several possible causes of arthritis: The commonest is a lifetime of activity, simply resulting in wear and tear on the joints. Arthritis may also occur following joint trauma or as a consequence of joint malformation (e.g. hip dysplasia), resulting in an unstable joint and increased wear and tear on the cartilage. Although arthritis cannot usually be cured, the good news is that we now have a great range of treatments to help your pet. For many pets that are carrying a few extra pounds, losing weight can make a huge difference. In addition to weight loss, many pets benefit from anti-inflammatory pain relief medication and food supplements containing glucosamine and chondroitin sulphate. If you are worried that your pet may have arthritis, please come and see us for a check-up!

### Joint Anatomy



Healthy synovial joint with smooth articular cartilage



Arthritic synovial joint with damaged articular cartilage

## Feline Leukaemia Virus – is your cat vaccinated?

DID YOU know that Feline Leukaemia Virus infection is one of the commonest causes of premature death in cats? The virus is found in the saliva of infected cats and is mainly spread by direct contact of one cat with another – usually licking or biting.

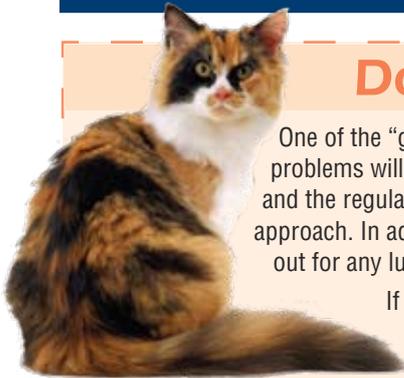
Although the virus can cause true leukaemia, on many occasions the effects are more related to suppression of the cat's immune system – leaving it fatally exposed to infections that a healthy cat would normally recover from. The disease is however unrelated to any human condition and quite specific to cats.

The good news is that there is a very effective vaccine, giving cats protection against this deadly disease. Please contact us for further information or an appointment.



Cat photo: Jane Burton

For further information on any of the topics covered in this newsletter, please contact your local surgery



## Don't ignore that lump!

One of the "golden rules" of veterinary practice is that early detection of problems will generally give us a much better chance of sorting things out and the regular health examinations we give your pet are a key part of this approach. In addition, frequent grooming allows *you* to keep a watchful eye out for any lumps, bumps, fleas, ticks and a host of other problems!

If your pet develops a lump there may be several possible underlying causes. These include allergic reactions (such as bee stings), abscesses, hernias and tumours. The most serious of these are tumours; these may be either *benign* – which tend to be slow growing and remain in one place, or *malignant* – which are frequently fast growing and spread to distant parts of the body.

If you do find a lump it is therefore very important we examine it as soon as possible – in order that we may establish the underlying cause and start any required treatment without delay. If you are concerned about a lump on your pet – or any other health problem, don't delay – please contact us today for an appointment!



Skin lump on the elbow of a cat



## Shape up!

OBESITY is a problem that affects pets and humans alike, and just like us, carrying extra weight places extra demands on virtually all the organs of the body. Excess weight can lead to or worsen many medical conditions including:

- joint and ligament problems,
- heart disease,
- increased blood pressure,
- diabetes mellitus (sugar diabetes),
- breathing difficulties,
- decreased stamina and heat intolerance – to name just a few!

Sadly, affected pets often become old before their time, have a diminished quality of life and a reduced life expectancy.

You can tell if your pet is overweight by feeling their chest – the ribs should be felt easily – but not seen, and dogs and cats should have a 'waist' between ribs and hips. If you feel your pet is getting a little portly we are happy to weigh him or her and advise you on their ideal weight. We will also examine your pet to check for any medical conditions (such as an under-active thyroid gland in middle aged dogs) that can result in weight gain.

To achieve weight loss, pets need a combination of a specially formulated calorie controlled diet (often down to around  $\frac{2}{3}$  their previous calorie intake) and more exercise. The good news is that as your pet loses weight, the benefits of increased healthiness and vitality are usually seen quite quickly. Please contact us for advice about your pet's ideal weight, diet and exercise regime – we are here to help!



## Winter worries!



IT IS that wonderful time of year again with winter walks, roaring fires and celebrations. As the chilly weather and festivities begin we've got a few tips to keep your pet healthy.

Firstly – when out and about, remember that whilst many dogs love playing in the cold and snow, slim fine coated breeds will find it much harder to conserve their body heat. Also beware of hazards such as frozen ponds and lakes.

Pets that live outside (such as pet rabbits and guinea pigs) need special consideration at this time of year. It is important to ensure that their hutches are warm, clean, dry and in a sheltered position. Bedding needs to be plentiful and changed daily; give them fresh food and water every day and check the water bottle regularly to ensure it has not become frozen.

Inside the home, don't forget that Christmas decorations such as ribbons and tinsel are often attractive to kittens and puppies – and if swallowed may lead to an intestinal blockage. Similarly make sure that turkey carcasses and string (used to tie up the carcass) are safely disposed of.

Beware also of other household hazards: dogs are particularly fond of chocolate (see box right), but this can prove lethal. In addition, there are now several reports confirming that dogs eating even fairly small quantities of raisins, grapes and sultanas can develop renal failure. Many pets

love to chew on house plants, however many of these are toxic to pets. Lilies pose a particular hazard to *cats* – with all parts of the plant including the pollen being toxic.

Finally fleas don't take winter holidays – so keep up your regular flea treatments!



### What's bugging you?

With the warm weather just a distant memory, it can be tempting to take a pause in the battle to keep your pets and your home flea free! However take a look at the picture on the right – these are **flea eggs** at 10x magnification!

Adult female fleas can lay in excess of 50 eggs per day – thus even a brief infestation can result in (literally!) thousands of eggs being produced. These fall off your pet and are deposited around your home in carpets and bedding where they can lie dormant for up to a year or more before developing into adult fleas.

### Chocolate alert!

Most dogs love chocolate, but as well as being very fattening, it also contains a naturally occurring substance called theobromine which is poisonous to dogs (but not humans you'll be relieved to know!)

The theobromine content, and hence the toxicity of the chocolate, varies according to the type of chocolate with plain chocolate the most dangerous. So if you *must* feed your dog chocolate, specially formulated pet chocolate is the safe option!

