



Autumn 2010

Westgate Veterinary Hospital

WWW.WESTGATEVETS.COM

NEWS

New Website Up And Running!!!

We are happy to announce our new and improved website is now up and running. The new site has practice news, meet our staff, large amounts of information on pet health and quick and easy access to answers to your questions. Check us out on www.westgatevets.com.



Firework Frenzy!



With bonfire night approaching, it is important to prepare early to try and reduce the stressful effects of fireworks. Here are some tips:

- Keep your pets inside at night during the firework period.
- Provide your pets with a 'den' to hide in such as behind the sofa.
- If your pet is showing signs of fearful behaviour, do your best to carry on as usual.
- We also recommend installing a DAP diffuser in or near your dog's den. This needs to be plugged in 2-3 weeks before the event.

As you can see, there are several steps you can take to help your pets during this stressful time, but planning ahead is also important if you intend to use a DAP diffuser. Please contact us for further information!

Should I have my pet neutered?

ONE OF the many decisions facing pet owners is that of neutering. The good news is that apart from preventing unwanted pregnancies, there are several *other* benefits to having pets neutered as outlined below.

An unneutered female **dog** usually comes into heat (or season) roughly twice a year. During this time she will become receptive to the advances of the unneutered male dogs in your area. Both sexes are prone to roam in an effort to mate, with the associated risks of becoming permanently lost, involved in fights, or worse still a road accident.



Cats are incredibly efficient reproducers and during the breeding season (in the warmer Spring and Summer months), unneutered females may come into heat as often as every 2-3 weeks and will endlessly try to escape and mate with a local male (tom) cat.



Unneutered tom cats will mark their territory by "spraying" objects with urine and are frequently involved in fights. Sexual contact and fighting also risks transmission of fatal viruses.

In females, neutering (or spaying) involves the removal of the ovaries and uterus under a general anaesthetic. The primary benefit of being spayed is that seasons are eliminated and unplanned pregnancies avoided! Spaying also removes the possibility of life threatening uterine infections (pyometras) and reduces the risk of developing potentially fatal mammary tumours later in life.

Neutering male cats and dogs involves removal of both testes under a general anaesthetic. Neutering makes your male pets less likely to stray and in dogs it can be of help in controlling excessive sexual drive and with certain types of behavioural problems. Neutered male cats are far less likely to urine spray and also fight (reducing the risk of acquiring fatal viruses), than entire males.

As you can see, there are many benefits to having your pets neutered. Please contact us if you would like any further information or call us to book your pet in for an operation.



But what about rabbits?

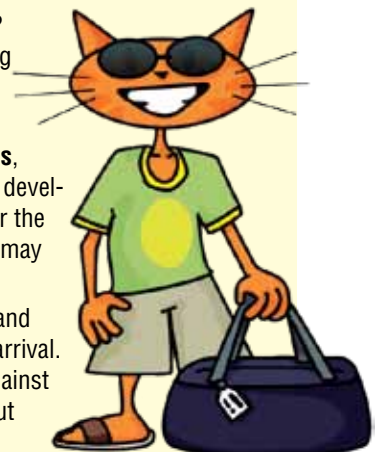
Just like dogs and cats, it is also possible to neuter male and female rabbits. Please ask us for further information!

Holiday time – taking your pet abroad!

DO YOU fancy taking your pet on holiday with you next summer? With the Pet Travel Scheme in place, many more owners are taking their dogs and cats on holiday and to live in other countries with no need for a stay in quarantine on the way back.

Your pet will need to be **microchipped, vaccinated against rabies**, and have a **blood test** done to prove that sufficient immunity has developed. They may then enter Ireland a *minimum* of six months after the blood test which confirms rabies immunity. This means that you may need to start planning now for next summer!

Additionally, your pet may re-enter Ireland only after certain tick and tapeworm treatments have been carried out and certified before arrival. Other treatments are also advisable to help to protect your pet against exotic diseases whilst abroad. Please ask us for more details – but don't delay if you are planning a trip for next year!



Photos: Jane Burton

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



Ear disease – an earie tale!

DID you know that ear problems are surprisingly common in pets? However unlike the condition in people, where “earaches” frequently involve the middle and inner ear, most ear problems in pets occur in the outer or *external* ear canals.

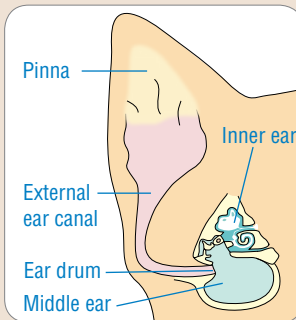
Anatomically, the ear is protected externally by a pinna (or flap). A narrow external ear canal carries sound down to the ear drum, where it passes onto the middle and inner ear.

In the healthy ear – see middle picture, the opening to the external ear canal is lined with smooth pink (or pigmented) skin with no evidence of any redness or discharge.

As mentioned above, most of the ear problems seen in pets occur in the *external* ear canal – a condition called **otitis externa** (sometimes called canker). Signs of otitis externa commonly include ear rubbing, head shaking, and red-dened, irritated skin lining the external ear canal. Additionally there is often a discharge which may be foul smelling.

There are several underlying causes of otitis externa. These include ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*) – see lower right photo, and trapped foreign bodies such as grass awns. Localised allergies affecting the skin lining the external ear canal are another cause, leading to scratching, which allows opportunistic bacterial and fungal infections to infect the external ear canal.

In common with many conditions, the key to success with otitis externa is *early diagnosis and treatment*. If your pet is showing any of the symptoms described above, please bring him in for a thorough examination since the sooner we can start treatment the better!



The ear in cross section. Most ear problems occur in the external ear canal



Healthy ear in a dog: view of the pinna and opening to the external ear canal.



Otitis externa in a cat with ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*) with a characteristic crusty brown discharge in the external ear canal. Inset: *Otodectes cynotis* (x 30), photographed down a microscope



Grass awn



Tick in situ



Microscopic view of a Harvest mite



Autumn Alarm!

IT'S HARD to believe that the Summer is over and Autumn is upon us again. Although this time of year has a beauty of its own, it also holds many hazards for our pets:

Fleas are an ever present problem, so now is not the time to lower your guard against these little pests!

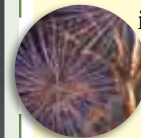
Ticks are another Autumn hazard, living in long grass and woodland areas. Ticks clamber onto pets, firmly attaching themselves and feeding on their blood. Worse still they can also spread a range of diseases including Lyme disease and Babesiosis.

Harvest mites are active in long grass at this time of year, swarming onto passing pets where they tend to congregate on the ears, eyelids, feet and the underside of the abdomen. They are easily identified as bright orange dots adhering tightly to the skin and are usually a cause of great irritation.

Fireworks are another hazard. It is always advisable to keep pets indoors on firework night, and this is especially important for those pets that are phobic about noise. These pets may benefit from medication to reduce anxiety; habituation to loud noises over a long period of time can also be helpful.

As the weather cools down **bees** and **wasps** become dozy and are easily caught by dogs and cats, but can still give your pets a nasty sting!

Keep your pets safe this Autumn! Let us advise you on keeping your pets parasite free, and fit and well during the firework season. Please contact us for further information.



Dog photo (top left): Jane Burton

Arthritis – new life for affected pets



MANY of our pets lead very active lives in their early years and thankfully take normal joint function for granted. However arthritis is a relatively common problem in older pets, and in the majority of cases occurs secondary to a lifetime of wear and tear on the joints. It may also occur as a result of joint trauma, or secondary to a malformation of the joint (for example hip dysplasia).

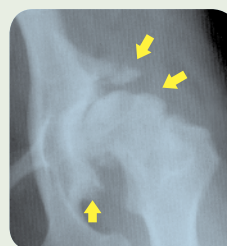
Arthritis is characterised by a breakdown of the joint cartilage and formation of secondary new bone around the joint. On an x-ray the fluffy new bone can often be clearly seen (see lower right x-ray). Arthritic joints are typically stiff, swollen and painful.

The signs of arthritic change are usually fairly obvious – pets show difficulty in getting to their feet after rest, dogs may show problems getting in and out of cars, and possibly a reluctance to go on walks.

The good news is that new forms of **medication**, together with **weight control**, can make a huge difference to the lives of affected pets. If you suspect your pet may have arthritis, come and see us for a check-up today – it really can make a difference!



Normal hip joint



Arthritic hip joint (in a dog with hip dysplasia). Note the fluffy new bone (arrowed) around the joint