



SPRING 2011

Westgate Veterinary Hospital

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NEWS



Spring has Sprung!

THE warmer spring weather is here at last. Here are a few tips to keep your pets fit and healthy:

- When going on walks, as the weather improves, try to make any increases in exercise *gradual* to avoid injury due to over-exertion.
 - Stick injuries are another hazard when out and about. Dogs love chasing and retrieving sticks, but sticks are sharp and if your dog makes a misjudgement when trying to catch a stick at speed, this can result in serious injuries to their mouth and throat. Toys such as frisbees are much safer.
 - Around the garden pets should be kept well away from garden chemicals such as fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides. **Slug pellets** are generally green or blue in colour are a particular risk. They frequently contain a chemical called *metaldehyde* which is very toxic to pets and should only be used with great care. Another hazard is **cocoa mulch** which gardeners often apply to flower beds in the spring and summer. Dogs are attracted to the mulch by the smell, but it contains high levels of *theobromine* which is very poisonous to dogs. As a result it is safer to use an alternative such as tree bark mulch.
 - Watch out for spring plants too – puppies in particular will sometimes chew on new leaves, and a surprising number of common garden plants can be toxic.
- Enjoy the spring sunshine, and take care!



Caring for your new pet!

TAKING on a new pet is always fun! Whether that pet is an independent moggy, looking for worship and admiration, or a cheeky pooch that will need far more input in terms of time and attention, there are lots of things to consider.

All pets need a warm place to sleep, some space of their own, as well as plenty of attention. It is important to explain to children that pets need to be left alone some of the time, and also to make sure that time is available for supervised play. For dogs, **early training and socialisation** at puppy classes helps them to develop confidence with people and other canines.

Diets: Good health also depends on feeding the right amount of an appropriate diet; we stock a range of specially formulated *life-stage* diets, perfectly balanced for pets of all ages.

Vaccinations: Puppies and kittens are usually protected in the first few weeks of life by antibodies from their mothers milk. However this immunity falls with time, leaving them susceptible to infectious disease. Vaccinations (to stimulate this immunity), will help to protect dogs and cats from a number of very serious infectious diseases. Two or more vaccinations are normally given as an initial course – giving your pet immunity for the first year of life. However the immunity provided by this initial course is not indefinite and will gradually fall and regular boosters will be required throughout your pet's life to maintain this immunity.

Microchipping (see back page) and **pet insurance** are also highly recommended! It's a fact that in an average year, 1 in 3 pets suffer illness or injury, so unexpected veterinary bills can occur at any time. So, for *peace of mind* – get your pet insured! If you would like any further information on any of the topics covered in the article, please ask a member of the practice team!

Vaccination against infectious diseases

We recommend you regularly vaccinate your pets against the following, potentially fatal, infectious diseases:

Dogs:

- Distemper
- Infectious canine hepatitis
- Parvo virus
- Leptospirosis
- Para influenza virus

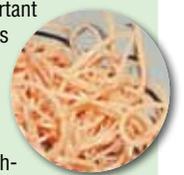
Cats:

- Cat flu virus
- Feline panleucopenia virus
- Feline leukaemia virus



Pesky parasites!

It is very important to treat puppies and kittens for **roundworms** since they can acquire these from their mothers early in life.



Following this, since our pets are readily infested with **fleas, ticks** and **worms**, treatment really needs to be life long! Please let us advise you on the most effective and convenient form of treatment for your pets.

Puppy and kitten photos: Jane Burton

Rabbit vaccination – keeping one jump ahead!



DID YOU know that, unless regularly vaccinated, rabbits are seriously at risk from two potentially fatal infectious diseases?

Myxomatosis is a very distressing viral disease spread by blood sucking insects such as rabbit fleas. Affected rabbits usually become very ill, commonly suffering from blindness and pneumonia – and sadly most will die.

Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD) is another highly contagious and deadly viral disease. The virus is spread both by direct contact between rabbits, or via contaminated hutches, bedding or food and sometimes inadvertently by humans. Symptoms include loss of appetite, lethargy, nose bleeds and sudden death.

Happily, we can now offer vaccination against both of these distressing diseases. Please contact us for further information on vaccination or any aspect of caring for your pet rabbit.

Getting to the root of the problem!



YOU TAKE care of your own teeth, but what about your pet's? Without regular dental care, dogs and cats (like us) will develop gum disease, leading to **mouth pain** and ultimately **tooth loss**.

Our pets usually start life with shiny white teeth, and healthy shrimp pink (or pigmented) gums. However, over

time, accumulation of plaque bacteria on the surface of the teeth leads to *inflammation* of the gums, a condition called **gingivitis** (otherwise called gum disease). This is frequently accompanied by the accumulation of calculus (tartar) on the surface of the teeth, and also very bad breath!

If the infection continues unchecked, bacteria start to penetrate *below* the gum line, destroying the tooth supporting structures – a painful condition called **periodontitis**. If left untreated, this leads to tooth loosening and eventually tooth loss as the disease progresses.

Cats may also suffer from one or more **tooth resorptive lesions** usually found at or below gum level. These are *unique to cats* and still not fully understood. Here the tooth is progressively destroyed, (see photo right) leading to exposure of the nerve running down the centre of the tooth. These are generally extremely painful lesions, although cats will frequently show no obvious outward signs of tooth ache.

Recent surveys have shown that 85% of dogs and 70% of cats over three years of age have some form of dental disease. Prompt recognition of any problems in the mouth gives the best chance of successful treatment. Please contact us if you would like a check-up for your pet, or would like to learn more about routine dental care in pets.

Gum Disease: the good, the bad and the ugly!



Healthy mouth



Gingivitis



Periodontitis

Tooth resorptive lesions are only found in cats



Typical lesion (arrowed). The tooth is progressively destroyed



Eyes: taking the long view!

DO YOU find your pets eyes are dull, sticky, or have a mucus discharge? Is there reddening of the white parts of the eye or the membranes surrounding the eyes? If your pet is showing *any* of these symptoms, please bring them in for a check-up. Whilst in many cases it may be a simple case of conjunctivitis which will clear up fairly quickly with the appropriate treatment, a more serious problem that is seen fairly commonly in dogs is 'dry eye'

The importance of tears

Healthy eyes should be bright, clear and free of *excessive* tears. Tears play a very important role in keeping your pet's eyes healthy – as outlined below.



Healthy eye

Dry eye is caused by a *reduced or total lack of tear production*. Tears lubricate the movements of the eyelids and provide oxygen and nutrients to the cornea (the clear outer part of the eye). If untreated, the eyes gradually become more and more inflamed as they are unable to cleanse and lubricate properly with insufficient tears.

This can become painful, and affected dogs often rub at their face causing further inflammation, eventually resulting in loss of vision.

Early diagnosis is the *golden rule* with eyes! The good news is that a diagnosis of dry eye can be made with a simple test to measure tear production. Medication, usually in the form of an ointment, can improve tear production and reverse the signs of 'dry eye', maintaining vision and keeping pets comfortable. So, if your pet has any of these symptoms, let us know.



Dry eye

When the chips are down...



IT IS sadly all too easy for pets to go missing and if this happens it could mean days or weeks of worry for all involved. However the good news is that microchip implants now offer a far more reliable method of identifying your pet than the traditional collar and tag.

The procedure involves implanting a tiny microchip (smaller than a grain of rice) under the skin, permanently identifying your pet. Each microchip carries a unique code which, together with information about your pet and your contact details, are held on a central computer database. Should your pet go missing, when found, the chip can

be read using special hand held scanners. Veterinary practices, the police and animal welfare organisations routinely scan all strays, hopefully ensuring that if the unthinkable happens, you can be speedily reunited. **The good news is that thousands of pets come home every year because their owners had them microchipped!**

And don't forget – having microchipped your pet, it is also *essential* to update your details if you move home. This can be done online, or you can ask at reception for more details. And if you haven't chipped your pets yet, ask about prices now – you'll find microchipping is surprisingly economical, especially when you consider all the benefits!



A special scanner is used to "read" the unique I.D. code. This code speedily identifies your pet.



Microchip implant x1