



New Pet Clinics

As we are no longer running puppy parties, the nurses at Westgate are now running a clinic for checks on new pets. This clinic is not just for puppies, the nurses will see kittens and adult cats/dogs that have recently become new members of the family. The nurses will cover a range of topics and answer any questions you may have regarding the health care of your new pet. These clinics are run **FREE OF CHARGE**. So please give us a ring on 041 983 8718 to arrange your FREE appointment soon!

Firework Fear!

The firework "season" can be a very stressful time for many of our pets and with this in mind we've put together some tips to help get them through this challenging time.



Give your dog a quiet place to hide at any time when there are fireworks

or other loud noises. Keep the windows and curtains in this room closed, and provide a comfy bed with lots of blankets to hide under.

The use of calming pheromone diffusers (Adaptil® for dogs and Feliway® for cats) can help pets feel calmer and safer in their environment. These should be plugged in at least 48 hours (longer if possible) before fireworks are due to start.

Reward your pet's calm behaviour with cuddles and treats. However if your pet is fearful, stay relaxed and act as a good 'role model' and carry on as if nothing is happening.

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 pheromone diffuser. Please contact us for further information!

Troublesome ticks!



WITH the onset of cooler Autumn weather, you may be tempted to start dropping your guard against ticks, but did you know that the late summer and early autumn is *the* peak time for pesky parasites such as ticks!

Ticks are generally found in areas of woodland, heathland and grassland, waiting for an animal or human to brush past them so that they can jump on and feed. They attach using their mouthparts and will feed on blood from their host for several days before finally dropping off.

Unfortunately, ticks can cause problems in two ways:

– firstly they can sometimes cause a marked tissue reaction at the attachment site. Secondly ticks can carry infectious diseases which can be transmitted to pets and humans. The most common one is Lyme Disease, though pets travelling abroad may also come into contact with ticks carrying other diseases such as Ehrlichiosis and Babesiosis – all very serious infectious diseases.

In order to minimise the risk of tick borne diseases, regular applications of spot-on treatments will both kill ticks and also help repel them. Additionally it's a good idea to routinely check your pet's coat for ticks. If you find a tick, removal is best attempted with a specially designed tick remover. Please let us advise you on the best tick control treatment for your pets!



An engorged adult tick attached to a pet and feeding on a blood meal

What should I do if I find a tick on my pet?

In order to minimise the disease risk it's a good idea to remove ticks as quickly as possible without leaving the mouthparts in situ. Specially designed tick removers that remove the tick by *rotation* are very effective.

Never pull or squeeze the tick. Instead, using a hooked tick remover, slide the v-shape under the tick and remove it with a twisting action.



Autumn Alert – keeping your pet healthy!



AS WELL as ticks there are a range of other parasites and issues for our pets to contend with at this time of year.

Fleas are present in huge numbers in early-Autumn, so do remember to keep treating your pets! **Harvest mites** are also active in long grass

in the late-Summer and Autumn and will swarm onto passing pets where they tend to congregate on the ears, eyelids, feet and 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. Like fleas, harvest mites can also bite humans!

Autumn aches: With the cold dark nights coming, it's important to ensure you make time for walking your dog or his mobility (and yours!) can suffer. Affected pets may show signs of joint stiffness – particularly after rest. It's also a good idea to keep a close eye on **your pet's weight**, since it's all too easy for pets to gain a few extra pounds in the Autumn and Winter months. If you are at all concerned, please book your pet in for a check-up.



Microscopic view of a Harvest Mite *Trombicula autumnalis*

Autumn toxic hazards

Many car owners top up their car radiators with **antifreeze** (containing ethylene glycol) at this time of year. Any spillage is very *palatable* to pets and even small amounts can cause kidney failure and death.

Autumn fruits such as **apples** and **conkers** will cause digestive upsets so avoid dogs getting access to them.



Car Photo: Warren Photographic; Tick Remover: Jenny Hale

Thirsty Work!



DID you know that *Diabetes mellitus* is a fairly common condition in dogs and cats and that as many as 1 in 200 pets may suffer from the condition?

Pets get most of their energy from carbohydrates which are broken down into glucose in the intestines. Glucose is then absorbed into the bloodstream where it travels to cells throughout the body, supplying them with energy.

In healthy pets, insulin (produced by the pancreas), allows glucose in the blood to enter the cells, enabling the body to function properly.

In diabetic pets, there may either be:

- Lack of insulin production *or*
- Failure of the body cells to respond properly to the insulin

Either way, this results in *too little* glucose getting into the cells and *excess* glucose in the bloodstream.

This excess glucose is filtered out by the kidneys and starts appearing in the urine. The presence of glucose in the urine draws more water into the urine, so larger volumes of urine are produced which needs to be replaced with excessive drinking.

Affected pets can show a range of symptoms, but common ones are:

- Excess thirst / frequent urination
- Weight loss despite increased appetite (they are always hungry)
- Tiredness and lethargy

If your pet is showing *any* of the symptoms described above, please let us see him or her for a complete health examination. Diabetes can usually be confirmed by a finding of glucose in the urine and a blood glucose concentration that is consistently higher than normal. We will also rule out a range of other causes of excessive drinking in pets (such as kidney disease).

The good news however is that although there is no cure for diabetes, the disease can usually be well managed with the help of daily insulin injections, specially formulated diets and (in dogs) carefully regulated levels of exercise.

Caring for your guinea pig

LIKE any other pet, guinea pigs (originating from South America) need a warm dry area to live, appropriate food, free access to water, and plenty of exercise and play. With appropriate care they are generally healthy pets, but there are a few problems they can suffer from.

Mange is one of the commonest problems we see. Affected guinea pigs are itchy and develop scaly skin, which is often most obvious on the ear tips initially. If untreated, areas of hair loss, self inflicted wounds and skin infection can develop. Spot on treatments can be used to treat mange, and other medicines may also be needed.

Another common problem is eye infections or eye disease due to grass seed fragments getting lodged in the eye. This may necessitate surgical treatment to remove the offending fragments so be vigilant and get in touch at the first sign of any eye problems.

Guinea pigs can also suffer from chest infections, and upset tummies just like any other species, and in such cases antibiotic treatment may be prescribed.

Finally, bear in mind that it sometimes can be difficult to tell the boys from the girls. Many new owners who think they have a same sex couple go on to discover that they haven't as guinea pigs breed like rabbits! So if you find things getting out of control, bear in mind that castration of males is an option to be considered.



An example of skin problems associated with the burrowing mange mite *Trixacarus caviae*.



Here a small grass seed has become embedded causing the eye to become inflamed.



The offending grass seed after removal.

Dry Eye – is your pet affected?



DOES your pet have sore, red or sticky eyes with a mucus discharge? These are all signs of a problem which may have a number of underlying causes. Common causes include conjunctivitis, allergies or scratches to the surface of the eye, but for some dogs the underlying reason may be a problem with a *lack of tear production* – resulting in 'dry eye'.

So why are tears important? Tears carry oxygen and nutrients to the cornea (the clear outer part of the eye), lubricate and cleanse the eyes, and help to protect against infection. Tears play an important role in keeping your pet's eyes healthy.

Dry eye is characterised by a *reduced or total lack of tear production* and is most commonly caused by destruction of the tear glands by the dog's own immune system. Recent figures indicate that as many as 1:22 dogs may be affected.

If left untreated, the eyes gradually become more and more inflamed and painful as they are unable to cleanse and lubricate properly with insufficient tears. *However the appearance of the condition can be quite varied* with some pets' eyes appearing relatively normal *despite* little or no measurable tear production.

Happily there is a simple test that we can perform to check tear production. This is called the **Schirmer Tear Test** and involves holding a sterile paper test strip in the corner of your dog's eye for one minute and measuring how far the dye in the paper travels in that time. The greater the measurable distance the greater the tear production and the less the chance of 'dry eye'.

Better still, medication for 'dry eye', usually in the form of an ointment, can improve tear production and reverse many of the signs of 'dry eye', maintaining vision and keeping pets comfortable. So, if your pet has any of these symptoms, let us know since the earlier the problem is diagnosed and treatment started, the better the long term outlook for affected pets.



Healthy eye



'Dry eye' but appearing relatively normal



'Dry eye' with more obvious changes