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Winter flea alert!



WITH the summer season now over, 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 fleas can lay in excess of 50 eggs per day. These fall off your pet and are deposited around your home where they can lie dormant for many months before developing into adult fleas.

For optimum flea control, treatment should be all year round. **Spot-on treatments** are ideal for treating your *pet*, whilst **household sprays** can be used to kill fleas (and their larval stages) in your *home*.

Arthritis – is your pet affected?



ARTHRITIS (also termed degenerative joint disease) is a condition that sadly affects pets and owners alike. The joints most susceptible to arthritis are those permitting limb movements – called synovial joints. The ends of the bones which meet at these joints are covered by very smooth articular cartilage. The joints are also lubricated with synovial fluid allowing friction free movement.

In pets with arthritis, this protective cartilage is damaged and worn away, resulting in exposure of the underlying bone, causing pain and inflammation. Secondary new bone is commonly deposited around the joint and may be seen on x-ray (see arrows). Affected joints commonly appear stiff, swollen and painful. Pets may have difficulty in getting up after rest and may be reluctant to walk or jump onto chairs or into the car. Additionally, the symptoms are made much worse by cold damp weather.

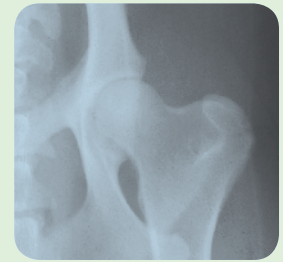
In the majority of cases arthritis occurs following a lifetime of wear and tear on the joints. It may also occur following joint trauma or as a consequence of joint malformation (e.g. hip dysplasia), resulting in an unstable joint with increased wear and tear on the joint cartilage (see lower right x-ray).



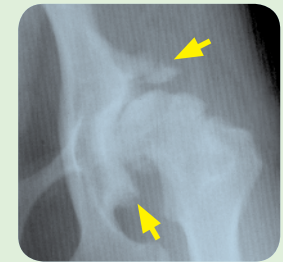
Although arthritis cannot usually be cured, the good news is that we now have an expanding range of treatments to help your pet. For pets that are carrying a few extra pounds, losing weight can make a huge difference. Many pets also benefit from anti-inflammatory pain relief medication and food supplements containing glucosamine and chondroitin sulphate. If you are worried that your pet may have arthritis, please come and see us for a check-up!

X-rays and arthritis

Radiography is commonly used to investigate joint problems.



X-ray of a **normal hip joint** – note the perfectly formed “ball and socket” joint of the hip joint.



Arthritic hip joint in a dog with hip dysplasia. Note the very shallow ball and socket joint and the secondary new bone around the joint (arrowed in yellow)

How healthy is your pet's mouth?



DID you know that **gum disease** is one of the commonest conditions seen in dogs and cats?

A healthy mouth usually has pale pink gums, and bright white teeth. However problems will occur if plaque and tartar are allowed to build up on your pet's teeth. Plaque is naturally sticky and is composed of millions of bacteria which, over time, will lead to *inflammation* of the gums – a condition called **gingivitis**. This is frequently accompanied by the accumulation of calculus (tartar) on the surface of the teeth and very bad breath! Worse still, if left unchecked, this process can result in **severe gum disease**, dental pain and eventually tooth loss. Don't let toothache ruin your pet's life – please let us advise you on caring for your pet's teeth and gums, and how to prevent dental problems.



Healthy mouth



Gingivitis and calculus



Severe gum disease

Brrrr – it's winter!



WITH the cold weather upon us we have put together some seasonal tips to keep your pets healthy at this time of year!

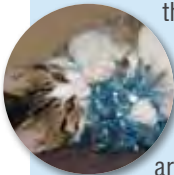
When out and about, remember that whilst many dogs love the cold and the snow, slim fine coated breeds (such as whippets and lurchers) will find it much harder to conserve their body heat and will benefit from dog coats. When walking in the evening, use reflective jackets and collars to ensure you can both be seen.



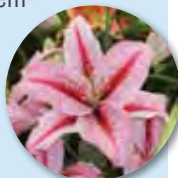
Spare a thought also for pets that live outdoors such as guinea pigs and rabbits and hens. Make sure their hutch is in a

sheltered position and that they have plenty of warm clean bedding – which should be changed daily. Also, keep a regular eye on the water container to make sure it doesn't become frozen.

Inside the home, dogs and cats are prone to eating all manner of Christmas decorations – ribbon and tinsel being amongst the favourites for kittens and puppies. If swallowed, they may cause an intestinal blockage. Similarly make sure that turkey carcasses are safely disposed of.



When cats are not going out as much they also like to amuse themselves by chewing house plants. Beware of **lilies** which are very toxic to cats. All parts of the plant, including the pollen, are toxic, causing kidney failure.



Whilst on the subject of edible items, don't forget that **chocolate**, especially the plain varieties, can be very toxic to dogs. Additionally watch out for dogs eating **grapes**, **raisins** and **sultanas** (or foods containing them such as Christmas pudding), since these can also be highly toxic to dogs.

Finally, have fun with your pets and stay safe over the festive season!

Winter weight worries!

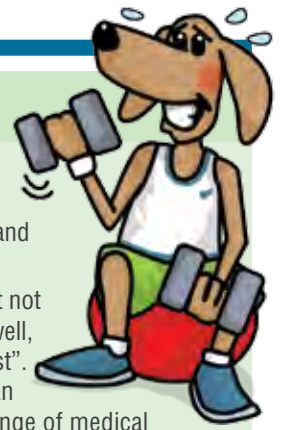
WITH the shorter days and cold nights – it's all too easy for pets to spend too much time lounging about in the warm rather than getting out and about! Add to this, the deluge of seasonal treats and the winter months can be very challenging weight wise!

With dogs and cats, their weight is ideal if you can easily feel, but not see, their ribs. Pets can also put on weight on their tummies as well, developing a sagging undercarriage and losing their natural "waist". Excess weight places huge extra demands on virtually every organ of the body. As a result, weight gain can lead to or worsen a range of medical conditions including: joint problems, heart disease, diabetes and many others.

So what can be done to help overweight pets? If you suspect your pet is getting a little podgy we are happy to weigh him or her and advise you on their ideal weight. We will also examine your pet to rule out any *medical* conditions which can lead to weight gain, (for example, an under-active thyroid gland in older dogs – see *Fact File* below).

To achieve weight loss we recommend feeding a **low calorie diet**, together with **more exercise**. The good news is that losing weight will usually make your pet much healthier and more active, and conditions such as arthritis are often greatly improved.

Please contact us today if you would like us to weigh your pet and for advice on managing and preventing obesity in dogs or cats – our staff are here to help!



Fact File: Thyroid problems in pets

WHILST most of us have heard of the thyroid gland, did you know that thyroid problems are surprisingly common in older pets?

The thyroid gland consists of two tiny lobes, located on either side of the trachea (windpipe) in the neck – see diagram. The thyroid gland produces thyroid hormone which regulates your pet's metabolic rate. Too much thyroid hormone speeds up the body's metabolism, whilst too little slows it down.

Over production of thyroid hormone is called **hyperthyroidism** and is a relatively common condition in cats over eight years of age. In the majority of cases this is caused by benign (non-cancerous) enlargement of one or both thyroid lobes.



Hyperthyroid cats typically have an increased appetite, but *despite* this commonly show signs of weight loss, and often become quite unkempt in appearance. In addition, excess thyroid hormone usually increases the heart rate, potentially leading to abnormal thickening of the heart muscle and increased blood pressure. As well as the above, a variety of other signs may be seen including increased activity, more miaowing and, often, a greater need for affection. Vomiting and diarrhoea may also be seen.

Happily however, in the majority of cases, hyperthyroidism in cats can be successfully managed. There are a range of treatment options including: daily medication, surgery, radio-iodine therapy, and feeding a special low-iodine diet.

Under production of thyroid hormone is called **hypothyroidism**, and is a relatively common condition in the older dog. Lower levels of thyroid hormone result in a *decrease* in the metabolic rate, usually leading to weight gain (with no increase in appetite) and generalised lethargy. Other signs often include coat problems and recurrent skin and ear infections.

Diagnosis of hypothyroidism is often more difficult than hyperthyroidism. However, once a diagnosis has been made, daily treatment with oral thyroid supplements is usually very effective.

The good news is that generally, most cases of hyperthyroidism in cats and hypothyroidism in dogs can be well managed once a diagnosis has been made. If you are concerned that your dog or cat is showing *any* of the clinical signs described above, please come and see us for a check-up.

