

Welcome to Darwin Veterinary Centre's Winter 2014-15 Newsletter. This issue brings you advice on keeping your pet safe through both the fireworks and festive seasons, the latest on the emergence of a new cat disease, CDS, information on caring for the teeth of rabbits and guinea pigs, news about changes in identichip legislation, the latest on the plight of hedgehogs, information about egg peritonitis in chickens, Movember for pets, special offers, and much, much more! It's been great to hear your thoughts and feedback from the previous issues (all of which are permanently available on the practice webpage), so please keep them coming, and don't hesitate to contact Sonya if you have any ideas for subjects you'd like us to cover. We hope you enjoy this issue!

Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia in dogs

You may have heard of 'Movember', where men are encouraged to grow a moustache throughout November each year, to raise awareness and funds for men's health.....but did you know that dogs also suffer with diseases of the prostate gland?

The prostate is an accessory sex gland found in male dogs, positioned just behind the bladder, close to the rectum, which produces a fluid to help nourish and transport sperm. Similar to humans, as dogs age, the prostate gland can increase in size – a normal aging process known as Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH). As the size of the prostate is determined by the male hormone testosterone, which is produced in the testicles, this condition is usually seen in uncastrated male dogs.

Recent studies have shown that an amazing 50% of uncastrated dogs will have developed BPH by the age of five, 60% by the age of six, and 95% by the age of nine! Initially an increase in size will not cause any clinical signs, however due to the location of the prostate, if there is significant enlargement it can lead to obstruction of the rectum, sometimes obstruction of the urinary tract, or occasionally both. Rectal obstruction causes the dog difficulty in passing stools, and may cause straining during defaecation, constipation or even faecal impaction, and the faeces may appear flattened or ribbon-like. If the enlarged prostate pushes on the urinary tract, it can cause stop-start urination, and the urine may contain blood.

Castration is the treatment of choice, as removal of the testes removes the source of testosterone, causing the prostate to start shrinking within a few weeks. Of course, as always, prevention is better than cure, and castration early in life avoids the issue of BPH completely.



Keep your pets safe this Christmas and New Year

Christmas and New Year are a time for fun, celebrating and spoiling our loved ones – including our pets. Here at Darwin Veterinary Centre we want you to enjoy a happy and stress-free festive season, so we have put together a guide to highlight some of the common dangers that our pets are exposed to during the holiday season.

- **Chocolate** – the harmful substance in chocolate is theobromine. Even small amounts can cause signs of toxicity which begin as vomiting and diarrhoea, and can progress to muscle tremors, seizures, and can even be fatal. Bear in mind that some dogs may help themselves to chocolate decorations or gifts that are on, or wrapped under, the Christmas tree, so it is best to keep these out of harms way.
- **Raisins, Sultanas and Grapes** – it is still not known specifically why these fruits can be fatal to dogs, even if they've had them dozens of times before. It is suspected that it is something to do with the 'bloom' sometimes seen on grapes, but until we know, they are best kept out of reach of our canine friends. Remember, most of these fruits are present in mince pies, Christmas cake and Christmas pudding.
- **Fatty food** – Over-indulgence on fatty leftovers or unfamiliar foods can cause gastroenteritis and pancreatitis, which can be extremely painful and require a period of hospitalisation to recover. Sausages, gravy, turkey skin and other fatty foods are well worth avoiding for your pet.



- **Xylitol** – Xylitol is a sweetener used in baked goods such as cakes and biscuits, which we tend to have around the home in abundance over the festive period and well into January. In dogs it can cause low blood sugar and liver problems, and be a serious threat to life.

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Dental Promotion



We've already started receiving enquires as to whether we will be running a Dental Discount month in early 2015.....and in short, the answer is YES. In February 2015 we will be offering 20% off all dental work, so if you've been told that your pet's teeth could look a lot nicer, or noticed tartar or bad breath from your furry friend, then February's Dental promotion may be of interest to you.

Tartar on teeth is a serious health concern for cats and dogs, and is always better removed. The bacteria that shelter under the tartar cause gingivitis, undermine tooth roots, causing abscesses and even early tooth loss. Bacteria also leave the mouth and travel via the blood stream to affect important organs such as the heart (causing early heart murmurs) and kidneys, contributing to early kidney failure.

If you would like to book your cat or dog in for a dental and take advantage of this offer, we advise early booking, as last year all places were booked-up within one week!! Although we will not be booking discounted dental appointments until 2015, please call to let us know if you might be interested, and we will then call you back when booking officially opens in January.

If you are unsure whether your pet needs a dental, please feel free to take advantage of our (no obligation) FREE DENTAL CHECKS, run by our dental nurse, Louise.

For further information on any of the subjects contained in this newsletter, please contact the practice on 01959 541153

Keep your pets safe this Christmas and New Year cont.

- **Christmas Plants** – Holly, Ivy, Mistletoe and Poinsettias are all toxic to animals. Lilies too make their way into our homes at Christmas, but remember that these are highly toxic to cats and cause kidney failure. Your cat doesn't need to eat the lilies, just to get the pollen onto their fur and groom it off, to ingest Lily toxins.
- **Christmas Trees** – take care to keep pets away from real Christmas trees, as pine needle ingestion can cause mild tummy upsets, and needles can get stuck in paws, causing irritation and foot chewing. Cats love to play with string, so sparkling tinsel is even more attractive to them. Dogs too have been known to eat a bauble or two! Ingestion of either of these festive decorations can all too frequently lead to the need for major surgery!
- **Batteries** – Understandably, we see the greatest incidence of battery ingestion at Christmas. Chewing a battery can cause nasty chemical burns to the mouth and result in heavy metal poisoning.
- **Antifreeze** – Ethylene glycol, the active ingredient of antifreeze, is very dangerous to both cats and dogs. It is very sweet tasting, and therefore highly palatable to our pets. Even small amounts can cause kidney failure, and sadly pet fatalities are not uncommon.



- **Party Time** – Some of our pets love having visitors, whilst others find it stressful to have unfamiliar people or other animals in their home. It is important to have a quiet area where your pet can escape from unfamiliar noise, hide away and feel safe. If you know your pet is prone to stress, then there are several stress-busting products which might help, such as Zylkene, or plug-in diffusers which release calming pheromones to help your pet cope with stress, e.g. Feliway.

- **Other Toxins** – Play Dough, ibuprofen/Anadin/Neurofen, salt, onions, macadamia nuts...and many more.

If you have any concerns about your pet's health, please contact us immediately for advice or treatment. Taking precautions will help to ensure that you and your family pets will enjoy a happy – and healthy – Christmas and New Year!

Chickens

We're frequently asked about the common chicken problem of Egg Peritonitis, which occurs when a yolk misses a bird's egg laying apparatus, and escapes instead into their abdomen. If just one yolk gets into the abdomen, the chicken will probably cope, but if several do, an abdominal infection or 'peritonitis' is likely to result.

Although any bird which is stressed at the time of ovulation may be affected by egg peritonitis, it is particularly common in ex-battery birds, older layers and those who have previously been affected by infectious bronchitis. As with many chicken illnesses the symptoms can be rather non-specific, but include dullness, lethargy, poor appetite, ruffled feathers, breathlessness and separation from the other birds. As the disease progresses, fluid frequently builds up in the bird's abdomen, leading to an up-right or 'penguin' stance.



When Egg Peritonitis occurs suddenly, the prognosis is usually better than if the chicken has been affected at a lower level over a longer period. Either way, treatment will typically include drainage of infected abdominal fluid, antibiotics and anti-inflammatories, together with supportive TLC. Hormonal implants to prevent future ovulation can also be used, and referral for spaying is another potential option. Sadly, if the chicken is suffering, the only humane option may be to put the bird to sleep. Although Egg Peritonitis is rarely completely curable, when caught early, the prognosis is much better, and early intervention can result in many more months or years of a happy, free-range life.

Dental Disease in Rabbits and Guinea Pigs

Dental problems are surprisingly common in both rabbits and guinea pigs, primarily because their teeth continue to grow throughout their lives. In the wild, both species graze on large volumes of grass for many hours a day, naturally causing a lot of teeth wear. However, when kept as pets and offered nutrient-rich foods, the teeth are not subjected to the same amount of wear, resulting in overgrowth.

Rabbit's teeth can grow by an incredible 1cm a month, so it is not surprising that molar overgrowth, with sharp enamel spurs is a commonly seen condition. These spurs frequently tear delicate tissues in the mouth, causing pain and making it difficult for your pet to eat. Because rabbits and guinea pigs can only open their mouths by 30 degrees, it can be difficult to check their cheek teeth, but we're here to help if you have any concerns or suspicions of a problem.



A further all too common problem with rabbits, is the failure of the front or 'incisor' teeth to meet correctly. This can be due to overgrowth of the cheek teeth, or a condition in its own right. Either way, regular burring of these teeth is frequently the only solution. We use an ultrasonic dental burr at the practice, which is very gentle and prevents fractures from occurring.

So what are the signs to look for if your pet has dental issues? Identifying symptoms in prey species animals is always hard, because they go to great lengths to hide them. However, a rabbit or guinea pig with dental issues will generally struggle to eat certain foods stuffs, may drop food, may dribble, have wet patches on their front legs, will lose weight, and may have facial swellings or runny eyes. Such symptoms always require a check up.



Buying your pet from a reputable breeder and providing the correct nutrition will really help prevent dental issues from occurring. Rabbits' diets should comprise 80% good quality hay (a daily amount of hay similar to their body size), and very small amounts of vegetables. Gnawing on apple or pear tree branches, as well as fibrous vegetable stumps, such as broccoli, should be encouraged.

Guinea pigs' diets should be mainly commercial pellet food, supplemented with hay and green foods. Like many other aspects of guinea pigs' health, vitamin C is important for guineas to form healthy teeth. This vitamin is notoriously unstable in opened packs of foods, so it is always best buying smaller bags for these animals. Look out for more about vitamin C and guinea pigs in our Spring Newsletter.

Feeding your rabbit or guinea pig the correct diet, combined with regular dental checks, will help to keep your pet happy and healthy.

Dementia in Senior Cats: Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome

There are now more elderly cats than ever before. Unfortunately, accompanying this growing geriatric population are increasing numbers of pets with signs of altered behaviour and apparent senility. Whilst some of these symptoms may result from a range of illnesses, feline Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS), analogous to human Alzheimer's Disease, is now widely recognised. A recent survey revealed that in the age range of 7-11 years, 36% of owners reported behavioural problems in their cats, and that this figure increased to a staggering 88% in cats aged 16+ years.

The cause of CDS is still unknown, but reduced blood flow to the brain and chronic free radical damage are both believed to play a significant role. The signs of CDS in elderly cats vary between individuals, but typically may include:

- Spatial disorientation, eg forgetting where the litter tray is, resulting in accidents;
- Loud crying, especially at night;
- Altered behaviour, eg increased attention-seeking or aggression, increased anxiety, or decreased responsiveness;
- Changes in sleeping patterns;
- Changes in activity, eg aimless pacing or reduced activity;
- Decreased grooming;
- Temporal disorientation, eg forgetting they have just been fed.

Although CDS can not be cured, its symptoms can be reduced with suitable intervention. Treatment options are usually extrapolated from studies of human Alzheimer's Disease, and include dietary changes, medical therapies and environmental modification.

Diets enriched with anti-oxidants are believed to reduce oxidative damage and improve cognitive function. Studies in humans have shown a high intake of fruit, vegetables, vitamins E and C, folate and B12 may improve cognition (although excessive intake can be harmful). Unfortunately, as of yet no placebo-controlled studies have been trialled in cats, although this is an active area of veterinary research currently, and it is likely that we will see diets launched in the future aimed specifically at combating CDS in cats.

Medication. There are a number of possible drug options for the treatment of Alzheimer's in people and CDS in dogs. Unfortunately, to date there are no medications licensed for the treatment of CDS in cats, although some small scale drug trials have shown some positive effects. In cases of CDS which are having a marked impact on a cat's quality of life, there are a few medications which we will prescribe 'off-license', which can be beneficial. Medications which combat anxiety, have also been shown to be beneficial to the condition, and are widely available eg Zylkene and Feliway.

Environmental Factors can have either a positive or negative influence on the signs of CDS in cats. Environmental enrichment, such as toys, interaction, and food-hunting games can lead to mental stimulation and increased activity, whilst a lack of environmental stimulation tends to result in frustration, which exacerbates the signs of CDS. Typically the scenarios which tend to cause older cats frustration are: inconsistent feeding times, inconsistent locking of the cat flap, moving food bowls and litter trays, or supplying a high-sided litter tray, but this is not an exhaustive list! Anything which helps reduce anxiety, such as synthetic feline appeasement pheromone (Feliway), is likely to be beneficial also. The table below shows a list of environmental adjustments which can be made for aging cats.



It's easy to overlook behavioural symptoms in elderly cats and consider them as 'normal ageing changes'. With advances in human and feline medicine, hopefully there will soon be no need for treatable conditions to go neglected or untreated. In the meantime, small environmental changes in our homes can have a really beneficial impact on our cats' quality of life in their later years.

Environmental adjustments for aging cats

Food and water	Place on a lower surface and provide ramps for easy access. Raise the bowls up a couple of inches, especially for arthritic cats. Water and food should not be together.
Resting places	Provide multiple, elevated platforms with padded, comfortable bedding. Provide ramps for easy access. Warmed beds can be soothing.
Litter trays	Provide one litter tray per cat, plus one more in multiple cat households. Use large, low-sided boxes for easy access. Keep boxes within easy reach of the cats. Sand-type litter is usually easier on cats' paws.
Hiding places or Exit routes	Provide easily accessed hiding places, including elevated sites. Provide ramps for easy access. In multi-cat households, ensure cats have time alone when they want it. Do not assume an elderly cat can comfortably use a cat flap.
Companionship	Elderly cats may have a decreased or increased desire for human or animal companionship. Cats may grieve at the loss of a long-term companion. Introduction of a new cat or dog can be very stressful for elderly cats.



Identichip News

As of 2016, it will be compulsory for all dogs to be microchipped and for the owner's contact details to be up to date. So now is a good time to ensure that your pets are identichipped, and that your contact details are current. If your pet has developed a medical condition since they were identichipped, such as diabetes, kidney disease or any condition which might require regular medication or a special diet, it can be helpful to get this recorded on the identichip database too.

If you can't remember if your pet's details are up to date, then you can easily check the database by calling 0844 463 3999, Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, or online at <https://www.petlog.org.uk/pet-owners/update-your-contact-details/>. To access your data online you will require your pet's chip number and Petlog ID number, which are on your pet's chip confirmation paperwork. Petlog charge a fee of £7.50 for amending your pet's records – a little annoying, but undoubtedly cheaper than a fine.

To encourage identichipping of all pets, we will be offering half price identichipping until the end of January 2015. To take advantage of this special offer, just give the practice a call.



Darwin Court Circular

Alice Passes Exams – After three years of study and training, Alice sat her veterinary nursing finals exams this summer, including the dreaded practical examinations, known as OSCEs. As we go to press, we've just heard the wonderful news that Alice has passed all her exams, and is now a fully-qualified, Registered Veterinary Nurse! We are all delighted, but probably none more so than Alice, who has put in well over a 1000 hours of study during the past few years. Alice now joins the 'fully-qualified' ranks of Terri, Louise and Andrea, and will be donning the famous dark green uniform and lapel badges of a Registered Veterinary Nurse. Well done Alice, we're all so proud of you!



Andrea is Back – We were all delighted to welcome back Registered Veterinary Nurse Andrea Rogers, in Autumn, after 10 months on maternity leave following the birth of her daughter, Lexi. It is great to have Andrea back at the practice as we all missed her, and lovely to see Lexi on a regular basis. "I missed all of the staff and so many of my ear patients whilst I was off", says Andrea, "And it's been great to catch up with so many pets whom I've known for years". Andrea is now back at the practice full-time, and as enthusiastic about pet ear care as always – so if you would like any help with ear cleaning or advice about ear care, you know who to approach – Andrea will be delighted to see you!

Remember, Remember, your pets this November... and New Year!

Whilst the rest of the family is looking forward to the seasonal delights of fireworks, our pets are probably dreading it! It has been estimated that up to 60% of all pets become distressed during the fireworks seasons of Halloween and New Year, due to the loud noises and bright lights. The most important thing is to remember to plan ahead of the big nights, so that you can ensure your pet is as calm and relaxed as possible. Here is our guide, which covers the main points to remember, to ensure that both you and your pet can relax and enjoy the sights and sounds of the season.

1. Plan ahead – decide upon a strategy and stick to it!
2. Ensure that your pets are microchipped and ideally wearing a collar with your phone number. It's also important to check that your contact details registered with the chip company are up to date, especially if you've moved house.
3. Ensure dogs are walked earlier in the day and cats are locked inside before the fireworks start, which can be as early as 4pm.
4. Prepare your home to become your pet's safety zone:
 - Dampen the loud and unfamiliar noise of fireworks by closing all windows and doors, and drawing the curtains;
 - Prepare a suitable room to contain your pet for the duration of the fireworks. An inner room most protected from outside noise is ideal. Prepare a bed where your pet can hide amongst familiar smelling bedding;
 - If your pet is used to the sound of the TV or radio, turn these on to a low level to sooth your pet with more familiar noises.
5. On nights when you anticipate fireworks, feed a carbohydrate-rich meal early on during the evening, such as cooked chicken and rice for dogs, or a slightly larger meal for your cat. This will ensure that your pet is slightly sleepy and more likely to tolerate loud noises.
6. Consider using pheromone diffusers, such as Adaptil (Dog Appeasing Pheromone) for dogs, and Feliway for cats. These disperse calming phermones into the room to reduce anxiety and stress in your pet.
7. If you know that your pet becomes very distressed and finds it difficult to cope during the firework season, make an appointment with a vet to discuss the possibility of using Zylkene, a complementary feed product containing a molecule well known to promote relaxation.
8. Sadly, some pets may only be able to cope with the sight and sound of fireworks by being sedated. This is a relatively extreme measure, as all sedatives cause some degree of cardiac and respiratory depression, and as such, any pet who may require sedatives needs to undergo a thorough clinical examination with a vet prior to any medication being dispensed.
9. If your pet reacts badly to the firework season this year, then you might consider preparing for next year by initiating a sound therapy or desensitisation programme. Playing sounds at a really low level, and gradually increasing the volume over several weeks, can teach your pet to be less afraid of the sounds of fireworks.



Hedgehogs



If you have a hedgehog in your garden, then consider yourself very lucky! The past 10 years have seen a marked drop in UK hedgehog numbers, so if you'd like to encourage hedgehogs into your garden or keep existing animals visiting, here are a few simple tips to make your garden safer and more attractive to these friendly creatures:

- Very tidy gardens are not friendly places for hedgehogs - log piles, long grass and piles of old leaves all make excellent homes;
- If you have a pond or pool, place a stone near the edge to allow swimming hedgehogs to climb out;
- Fires – piles of cuttings and branches are attractive to hedgehogs, so move any piles which you intend to burn, immediately before setting light to them;
- Supplement their normal diet with tinned cat or dog food (avoid fish flavours) - never feed bread and milk;
- Mowing and strimming – long grass is a favourite place for hedgehog families to spend the daylight hours, so be extra vigilant when cutting these areas to avoid inflicting nasty laceration injuries;
- Netting – garden netting can easily trap hedgehogs and/or entangle their limbs. If you're using netting in your garden, check it daily to avoid accidents;
- Hedgehogs hibernate in cold weather, traditionally between November and March, and it is imperative that they have enough fat reserves to survive this period. If you find a juvenile hedgehog weighing less than 500g during late autumn, it may need help to survive the winter. If in doubt, visit www.stiggYWinkles.org/ or call our practice.

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