

Welcome to our Spring / Summer 2016 Newsletter. With the prospect of warmer weather to come, this issue brings information on avoiding the pet pitfalls associated with being out and about during the Summer months, along with details of one of the most common cat diseases, Hyperthyroidism, introduces you to our new vet Keri, and has lots of information on parasites for rabbit owners. Our pet product review is back, together with a new section reviewing some of the best pet-related apps. All that, and how to recognise common dental ailments, and the new identichip law affecting dog owners from April. We hope you enjoy this issue!

Welcome Keri

Please welcome vet Keri Holmes, who joined our practice team in February this year. Keri qualified from London Vet School in 2010 and has worked as a small animal vet in



the South East since then. She recently undertook a two year certificate course in Small Animal Internal Medicine and successfully gained this qualification in 2015. Keri enjoys the diagnosis and management of cases such as kidney disease, hyperthyroidism and diabetes to name just a few and aims to provide the best possible care for her patients and clients. In addition, Keri also has a special interest in abdominal ultrasonography of cats and dogs. This method allows for a minimally invasive way of looking inside a pet's abdomen without requiring an operation and it can be a very useful tool for making a diagnosis in a sick animal or diagnosing pregnancy.

In her spare time, Keri enjoys outdoor pursuits such as cycling, walking her dog and taking part in the occasional triathlon! She has a Border x Norfolk Terrier called 'Olive' (who you may meet around the practice, as she has joined the team too!), and a tortie and white rescue cat called 'Peaches', who came from RAIN in 2010.

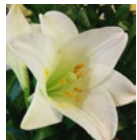
We're all delighted that Keri has chosen to join the Darwin team, and we know all our clients will make her very welcome. Keri looks forward to meeting you and your pet!

Seasonal Concerns

Ticks – As our pets range further from home during the warmer months, they are much more prone to picking up parasites such as ticks, particularly where sheep and deer graze. These revolting parasites feed on our pets' (and our!) blood, and as they increasingly carry diseases, such as Lyme's Disease, are always best avoided. Seresto collars worn between March and September offer great protection and peace of mind.



Bulbs – Many Spring bulbs, such as daffodils, tulips, hyacinths and lily of the valley can make a tempting treat for dogs when dug up in the garden. Each contains a different compound, but all can cause irritation of the mouth and oesophagus, drooling, vomiting and even diarrhoea. Although no specific antidote exists, supportive veterinary treatment is usually required with such poisonings.



Lilies – All parts of lily plants are highly toxic to cats, but of course most cats are too sensible to eat them! The problem usually arises when cats inadvertently brush against flowering lilies, getting the pollen on their coats, which they later groom off and ingest. Our advice for cat owners: why take the risk of growing lilies in your garden? Choose an alternative plant for those Summer borders!

Swimming – Every year there are reports of arthritic dogs swimming in rivers, and then being unable to pull themselves clear of the water or up the banks, with tragic consequences. If your canine friend is starting to experience arthritis, ensure that your pet can easily get out of water – or avoid it. As featured in the article on Ear Disease in our last issue, swimming can frequently be the trigger for recurrent ear infections, and may be best avoided if your dog is prone to this painful and frustrating condition.

Home improvements – if you're planning to spruce up your home and garden as the weather improves, be mindful of the effects of many commonly used household products. Patio cleaners frequently contain benzalkonium chloride which is highly poisonous to cats and dogs, whilst white spirit, turpentine and wood preservatives such as creosote can cause skin irritation and neurological signs if inhaled or ingested.

Chocolate – When you're enjoying chocolate at Easter or during the Summer months it can be very tempting to indulge your pet too. But remember, chocolate can be fatal for our pets, and sometimes in just tiny quantities. Cocoa powder and dark chocolate with a high cocoa content are the worst culprits, but the active ingredient, theobromine, can cause neurological and gastrointestinal problems from any chocolate source. Why take the risk?!



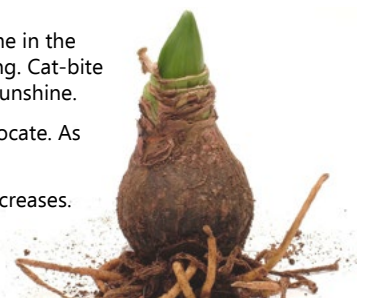
Sea Water – A trip out to the beach can make for a wonderful walk with your dog, but don't be surprised if they start vomiting after playing in the surf. Salt water is a well known cause of vomiting, and can make for a very unpleasant journey home in the car!

Over-exercising – We all feel more active in brighter weather and more inclined to take our pets further on those balmy Summer's evenings. However, if your pet suffers from arthritis, a sudden increase in exercise will lead to stiffness and discomfort a few hours after returning home. Better to get out more frequently, and stick to the same duration of walk if your dog is not in the 'first flush of youth'.

Cat-bite abscesses – Like us, our cats wander further from home in the warmer months, which can lead to territorial conflict and fighting. Cat-bite abscesses are an all too common accompaniment to Summer sunshine.

Fleas – with warm weather comes more fleas! Get your retaliation in first, and apply a good preventative, like Advocate. As always, prevention is better than cure!

Fly strike – If the warmer months bring rain, then the risk of fly strike to rabbits, but also cats and dogs, greatly increases. Flies are attracted to warm, wet fur, especially if there is a wound or faecal soiling on our pets. Fly-repellents for rabbits offer peace of mind, but there is no substitute for daily examination of your pet and scrupulous hygiene.



Hyperthyroidism in Cats

What is hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is a very common disorder of older cats. It is caused by an increase in production of thyroid hormones from the thyroid glands in the neck. These hormones are responsible for regulating many body processes, and when too much hormone is produced, the clinical signs can be quite dramatic. Because thyroid hormones help to control the body's metabolic rate, affected cats tend to burn up energy too rapidly, and typically suffer weight loss despite having an increased appetite and increased food intake.

Fortunately the vast majority of cats that develop hyperthyroidism can be treated very successfully.

What causes hyperthyroidism?

In the vast majority of cases of hyperthyroidism it is caused by a benign (non-cancerous) growth in one or both of the thyroid glands. The underlying cause is currently unknown. Rarely, a malignant (cancerous) tumour can be the underlying cause of the disease.

Signs of hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism is usually seen in middle-aged and older cats, but can occasionally be seen in cats as young as 6 years old. Male and female cats are affected equally. Affected cats can show a wide variety of signs, which are subtle at first and become more severe over time as the underlying disease gets worse. The classic symptoms of hyperthyroidism are:

- Weight loss;
- A good or increased appetite, 'polyphagia';
- Increased thirst, 'polydipsia';
- Increased activity, restlessness or irritability;
- An increased heart rate, 'tachycardia';
- A poor and unkempt hair coat.



Occasionally, some cats may develop mild diarrhoea +/- vomiting, whilst others may become noticeably intolerant of heat and actively seek cooler places to sit. Although most hyperthyroid cats show a good or increased appetite and restlessness, in some cases there may be generalised weakness, lethargy and loss of appetite.

Complications of hyperthyroidism

1. Heart Failure - If left untreated, hyperthyroidism has important consequences on the heart, causing it both to beat too fast, and to undergo muscle changes which will eventually cause heart failure if untreated.
2. Hypertension – High blood pressure or 'hypertension' is another potential complication of hyperthyroidism, which can cause damage to the eyes, kidneys, heart and brain. Fortunately, hypertension can usually be easily treated with medication.
3. Kidney Disease – Kidney disease is not caused by hyperthyroidism, but frequently also occurs in older cats. Particular care is needed when both these conditions are present, as managing hyperthyroidism can sometimes have adverse effects on kidney function.

Diagnosis

The thyroid glands of cats with hyperthyroidism are usually enlarged, and this may be detected by a vet on careful palpation of the cat's neck. However, a blood test is needed to confirm a diagnosis and to measure the level of thyroid hormone in the blood. Usually, measuring the thyroxine (T4) level is all that is required to confirm a diagnosis, but sometimes additional tests may be needed, as hyperthyroidism may cause other abnormalities. Blood and urine tests are usually advised to help rule out concurrent problems. Blood pressure should also be checked with hyperthyroid cats, and occasionally examination of the cat's heart, via an ECG (electrical tracing of heart activity) or echocardiography (ultrasound of the heart).

Technetium scanning is a relatively new technique which is available for diagnosing the extent of hyperthyroidism at some specialist centres. The scan involves injecting a very small dose of a radioactive chemical (technetium) into the cat's vein. The technetium is selectively taken up by abnormal thyroid tissue, and this can be detected using a special gamma camera. As approximately 10% of cats with hyperthyroidism have abnormal tissue located at sites other than just the neck this technique is particularly valuable if surgery is being considered. The procedure is simple, safe and easy; the only downside is it is very expensive.

Treatment

There are four main options for the treatment of hyperthyroidism, and irrespective of which is chosen, most cats usually experience a complete reversal of all the signs of the disease. Regular check-ups will usually be needed to check kidney function and ensure long-term thyroxine levels are controlled.

1. Medical management

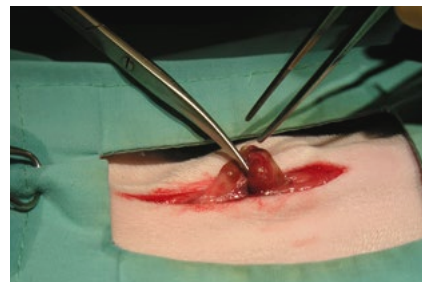
The most commonly used treatment is long-term administration of anti-thyroid drugs, such as Vidalta or Felimazole. These drugs are available in tablet form and they reduce both the production and release of thyroid hormones from abnormal thyroid tissue. They do not cure the disease, but



manage it, so the medication has to be given daily for the rest of the cat's life. The treatment dose is adjusted to effect. Side effects are uncommon, but some cats experience a poor appetite, vomiting and lethargy for the first few weeks of treatment. Even if surgery or radioactive iodine treatment is considered, medical therapy is often used initially to monitor the effect of successful treatment on kidney function, and to reverse the symptoms which make hyperthyroid cats less able to undergo an anaesthetic.

2. Surgical thyroidectomy

Surgical removal of the affected tissue, 'thyroidectomy' can produce a permanent cure and is a common treatment for many hyperthyroid cats – particularly when administering regular tablets may prove difficult. In general, thyroidectomies are very successful and can produce a long-term or permanent cure in most cats. However, occasionally signs of hyperthyroidism develop again at a later time if previously unaffected thyroid tissue becomes diseased. To reduce the anaesthetic and surgical complications, where possible cats should initially be stabilised with medical therapy before surgery is performed. The major risk associated with surgery itself is inadvertent damage to the parathyroid glands – small glands that lie close to or within the thyroid glands themselves, and which have a crucial role in maintaining blood calcium levels. As such, it may be recommended that a hyperthyroid cat undergoing thyroidectomy may be hospitalised for a few days after surgery, to ensure the blood calcium levels are stable. After surgery, occasional blood tests are recommended to ensure normal thyroid hormone levels are maintained.



3. Radioactive iodine therapy

Radioactive iodine therapy is a very safe and effective treatment for hyperthyroidism, and has the advantage of being curative in most cases, with no ongoing treatment. The radioactive iodine is administered via injection and taken up by thyroid tissue, resulting in destruction of the abnormal thyroid tissue, without damaging surrounding tissues. There are no significant side effects with this treatment, but because cats are temporarily radioactive, they have to be kept hospitalised for a period after treatment as a precaution, usually around 3 weeks. This form of treatment is therefore only available at a few specialist centres, and with an associate cost of £1,800+.

4. Dietary treatment

In the past few years a new option for managing hyperthyroid cats has become available, dietary management. This involves feeding a special diet that has strictly controlled levels of iodine. As iodine is used by the thyroid gland to make thyroid hormone, if iodine levels are limited, it reduces the over production of the disease-causing hormones. The downside of this treatment is that cats need to consume this diet exclusively to ensure effective control, and that these diets are not palatable to some cats. Nevertheless, many cats can have their disease controlled in this way, and it is an alternative to other forms of therapy for a number of cats.



Great Apps for Pet Owners

- Dog Friendly (by Fetch Digital Limited)**
Allows you to search for the best dog friendly places and businesses local to you in the UK, including groomers and sitters, pubs and cafés, beaches and even hotels.
- APCC (by ASPCA)**
A brilliant app to allow you to quickly and accurately identify common poisons and hazards that could harm your pet. This app will help you to easily identify possible toxins, give an indication of their severity and whether you should seek veterinary advice.
- Cardalis (by CEVA)**
Ideal for owners of pets with heart disease. This app helps you accurately measure your pets respiratory rate (an early indicator for heart disease, and important for long term monitoring). It will track your pets respiratory rate over time, and remind you when to next take a reading.
- MapMyDogWalk (by MapMyFitness)**
Track your daily route, time, distance, speed and calories in real-time using your GPS enabled mobile device. Map Pins also show where to find dog parks, dog-friendly restaurants, water fountains, and the all-important poo bag dispensers!
- Pet Manager – Pet Pal (by Apps on Toast)**
An easy to use pet diary manager to help keep your pet's health and details organised. Store vital details like vets, insurance and birthdays, create pet medical reminders and track all medical and weight records. Especially useful for all those with multiple pets to keep track of!

How to recognise common dental ailments

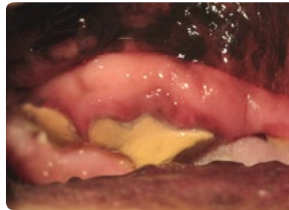
FORLs in cats

FORLs (Feline Odontoclastic Resorptive Lesions) have a very characteristic appearance which can be easily recognised at home if your cat will permit you to look at their teeth. They are typically seen as small areas of red tissue on one or more teeth, and occur as the tooth root is diseased and resorbed. Sadly, they are always very painful. Since our cats don't know that dental pain can be alleviated, their innate drive to feed ensures that they keep eating, regardless of how painful their mouths are. FORLs always require action.



Gingivitis in dogs

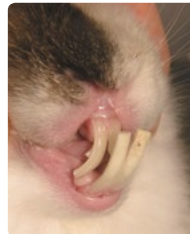
Gingivitis literally means 'inflammation of the gums', and can be seen as areas of dark pink or red gum surrounding one or more teeth. The good news is, with appropriate home care, such as tooth brushing, gingivitis can be reversed, leading to a healthier mouth and safeguarding the affected teeth. If good dental care is not instigated at this stage, the gingivitis is likely to progress to periodontal disease, with a far greater risk of the tooth needing to be extracted.



Incisor mal-alignment in rabbits

Mal-alignment of rabbit's front or 'incisor' teeth is a common condition, which can arise due to a pet's genetics or feeding an inappropriate diet, frequently one which is deficient in fibre or hay. It is often seen with overgrowth of the back or 'cheek' teeth, which in turn can lead to weepy eyes. Veterinary advice is always best sought.

If you have any questions or concerns about your pet's dental health, why not book a dental check-up with Louise Neal, our dental nurse? Louise will be happy to examine your pet's mouth, advise on dental health, home care or any action that might be needed – free of charge!



Independent Product Reviews

Dicky Bag, from £21

We all try to be responsible dog owners and pick up our dog's poo when we're out walking.....but when there's not a poo-bin nearby, the reality of carefully carrying a smelly bag around with you is not enjoyable - enter the Dicky Bag! The Dicky Bag is an ultra lightweight, airtight, washable and leak-proof bag which attaches to your dog's lead, in which you can store those nasty knotted plastic bags until you find a suitable bin. It's got an easy access compartment for storing poo-bags, a built-in air-freshener and should greatly enhance any dog walk!



Frolicat Bolt, £16.99

We've been hearing great reports from many cat (and dog) owners about this automatic laser pointer toy. Lots of cats enjoy chasing laser pointers, and if your cat is overweight, an indoor pet, or just sedentary, chasing and pouncing on the moving red dot can have health benefits too! The Frolicat Bolt is designed to sit on a table or windowsill, and randomly moves a red laser spot around for 15 minutes at a time – meaning you don't have to! It's battery operated, and we've heard of several cats who sit and meow to have it turned on!



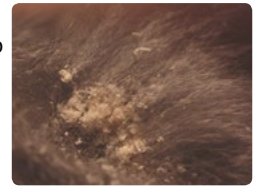
Parasites in Rabbits

Ear mites or 'Psoroptes' are the most common parasite in rabbits, causing severe crusting and pain to the external ear, and consequently leaving your bunny very quiet and subdued. The mites are shed in the skin scales and can survive in the environment for up to 3 weeks. Treatment consists of pain relief, and a weekly spot-on anti-mite treatment.

Rabbits can be affected by **fleas** just like dogs and cats, and show the similar signs of itching and visible fleas or flea faeces in the fur. Treatments include treating with rabbit-licensed spot-on products, as well as treating the environment and any in-contact animals.

Cheyletiella is a fur mite and is also known as "walking dandruff" due to its appearance.

The mites cause obvious itching and scaling of the skin. It should be noted that these mites have some zoonotic potential i.e. can infect humans, so owners may also find themselves scratching! Treatment with a suitable licensed spot-on is usually very effective.



Fly strike is commonly seen in the summer months, especially in rabbits that have urine or faecal soiling around their back end. Blowflies lay their eggs in the soiled fur, and can cause rapid deterioration of your rabbit as the eggs hatch into flesh-eating larvae. Intensive treatment is required, and also an investigation into the underlying causes of the disease, so we would always advise checking your rabbit daily.

Identichip Laws

From the 6th April 2016, all dogs 8 weeks of age and older must be microchipped and the chip registered on an approved database. Failure to comply may result in a **£500 fine**, although it is likely that a 21 days period of grace may be given. However, there is also a £500 penalty for owners of pets who are chipped, but who have subsequently moved house and not kept contact numbers etc. up to date!

So now is a great time to check your pet's chip registration, and make any amendments needed, before the fines come into force. You can easily check the database by calling 0844 463 3999, Monday-Friday 9am-5pm, or check online at <http://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.

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