



Beacon Hill Veterinary Clinic

SPRING 2010

NEWS

Pollen Problems

WITH Spring here at last, the longer days and warmer weather can signal the start of the allergy season for many. And it's not just us who can be affected by allergies, our pets can suffer too.

What are the signs of allergies in pets?

Whilst our pets aren't likely to sneeze when confronted with a garden full of flowers, they can suffer from skin irritation. Common signs of allergy include sore red itchy skin, hair loss and inflamed ears or feet.

Can allergies be cured?

Unfortunately allergies cannot be cured, but the good news is that they can normally be well managed. The first step is to work out what is causing the allergy. A simple blood test can reveal what your pet's immune system is reacting to, be it a tree, weed, flower pollen or a combination of several allergens.

Once the offending allergens have been identified it's time to tackle the root cause of the allergy. One tactic is avoidance, this can be a useful strategy including changing your exercise route to avoid certain trees or keeping the lawn mown.

Another option is desensitisation vaccines; these work by injecting a weakened, diluted allergen under the skin so that the immune system becomes accustomed to it. This simple and popular option reduces the need for repeated doses of steroids and antihistamines leading to a much happier pet and owner!

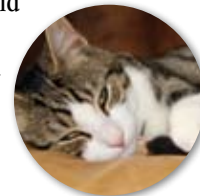
Don't delay! If your pet is prone to itching it could be an allergy; come and see us for a check-up!

Meal deal – choosing the ideal diet!



CHOOSING a diet for your pet can sometimes seem a daunting task with such a huge range to select from! To make matters more complicated – and just as with ourselves – our pet's dietary requirements *alter* as they grow from tiny kittens and puppies, into adulthood and eventually old age. However, the good news is that with *life-stage diets*, we are able to feed our pets a correctly balanced diet for every stage of their lives.

Puppies and kittens, because of their rapid rate of growth, need *higher* levels of energy, protein, fatty acids and other nutrients. Specifically formulated junior/growth diets ensure controlled growth (avoiding obesity) and healthy joint development. Puppies of large and giant breeds also have different dietary requirements and require their own specially formulated diets.



Adult pets, with their major growth phase now complete, require a balanced diet to keep them fit and healthy, but with *lower* levels of many of the nutrients mentioned above. To achieve this, adult pets require carefully balanced adult/maintenance diets.

Older pets also benefit from specifically formulated geriatric/senior diets. These have a reduced calorie content to help prevent weight gain in older age, higher fibre content to reduce constipation and changes in protein and mineral levels to reduce the workload of internal organs such as the kidney, liver and heart.

Whether healthy or poorly, your pet will benefit most from a high quality diet that suits their needs. If you have any queries on the most suitable diet for your pet – we would be delighted to help you.



Prescription Diets

Pets with particular disease problems may also benefit from specific "*prescription diets*". These are specifically formulated diets that can help greatly in the treatment of a variety of conditions including diseases of the kidneys, heart, joints, skin and teeth.

The heart of the matter!



Chest x-ray of a dog with an enlarged heart and heart failure. Specifically formulated cardiac diets are a key part of treatment.



Photo: Jane Burton

Don't get caught out by the cough!

KENNEL COUGH, otherwise known as infectious bronchitis, is a highly contagious disease of the dog's respiratory tract. The cough is passed from dog to dog wherever they meet – out on walks, on the beach in the summer, at training classes, dog shows and of course boarding kennels!

Dogs of all ages can be affected and signs include a harsh, dry, whooping-type cough. Whilst some dogs recover relatively rapidly, others may cough for weeks and some may get more serious complications such as pneumonia.



Prevention is much better than cure, because without vaccination, treatment of kennel cough can be a costly and lengthy process involving isolation and antibiotic therapy. Kennel cough is caused by a mixture of viruses and a bacterium – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. We strongly recommend that dogs are vaccinated before staying in a boarding kennels and at any other time when the disease is rife. Please contact us for an appointment today!

For further information on any of the topics covered in this newsletter, please contact us on (01428) 606396

Rabbits – keeping one jump ahead!



LIKE other pets, your rabbit needs to visit us from time to time for a routine health examination and vaccinations. Here we look at some of the health issues facing pet rabbits.

Vaccination With the onset of warmer weather, now is the time to ensure your rabbit is vaccinated. Vaccination primes your rabbit's immune system to recognise and defend against incurable and life threatening infectious diseases – specifically Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic disease.

- **Myxomatosis** is a distressing viral disease spread by rabbit fleas, mosquitoes and other blood sucking insects. Affected rabbits typically suffer from swollen eyes, leading to blindness and death in most cases.



- **Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD)** is another very serious viral infection. It spreads easily between rabbits or via contaminated hutches, bedding or food. Infected rabbits may show a variety of signs including nose bleeds, loss of appetite and lethargy. Sadly most will die despite treatment.

Happily we are now able to offer you protection against both of these deadly infectious diseases – please contact us now to arrange a health check and vaccination.

Flystrike is a really big problem in rabbits during the warmer months. Rabbit rear ends often become damp and this moist area attracts flies, which lay their eggs there. These eggs hatch out into maggots, which are capable of burrowing through the rabbit's skin and into the underlying flesh. Rabbit rear ends should be inspected **daily** for fly eggs and maggots. Soiled bedding should also be removed on a daily basis to minimise flies being attracted to the hutch.

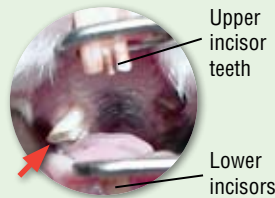
Please don't hesitate to ask us for further information on these or any other health issues affecting your rabbit.

Tooth problems

You may be surprised to learn that dental disease is a very common health problem in rabbits. Rabbits have *continuously growing* teeth, with both the cheek teeth and the incisor (front) teeth growing by as much as 1-2 mm per week!

This enables wild rabbits to graze *all day* on grass and other abrasive foods without wearing out their teeth!

Equally, feeding your pet rabbit the correct diet is very important. Their ideal diet includes plenty of hay (high in fibre), together with a selection of fresh food and a small amount of commercial rabbit food.



Feeding a high fibre diet will help to reduce the incidence of *overgrown* cheek teeth (arrowed) These are sharp and lacerate the gums.

High fibre diets promote dental health, reduce obesity and keep them occupied for several hours each day! Commercial rabbit foods are now available as extruded pellets and this helps to avoid the problem of rabbits selectively feeding – leaving vitamins and minerals uneaten.

Kidney disease Is my pet affected?



THANKFULLY most of our pets lead healthy active lives. However for some, kidney disease can be a problem and it is particularly prevalent in older pets (especially cats).

Dogs and cats have two kidneys and each kidney has several hundred thousand tiny filters called **nephrons**. These filter the blood, removing toxic waste products, salts and water which are then concentrated to form urine.

Over time a proportion of the nephrons will disappear with age and not be replaced. Other factors such as toxins, infections or cancer may also destroy nephrons.

However, the kidneys have *excess* filtering capacity with the result that *visible* symptoms of kidney disease are not usually seen until roughly two thirds of the nephrons have been lost. If this stage is reached the filtering capacity falls and toxic wastes begin to accumulate in the blood. Common symptoms include **increased drinking and increased urination, weight loss, muscle wastage, lack of appetite and lethargy**.

With regular veterinary check-ups the symptoms of kidney disease can often be detected at an earlier stage – *before* they become outwardly noticeable. So don't delay – if your pet is showing *any* symptoms of kidney problems, please see us for a check-up. Whilst kidney disease cannot be cured, a combination of specially formulated diets that reduce the workload of the kidneys, together with novel forms of medication, can often significantly improve the quality of life for affected pets.

Parasites: Spring into action!

THE warmer months are peak season for pesky parasites and two of the most annoying are fleas and ticks!

Fleas need little introduction to most pet owners! Adult fleas are 2-3mm in length and can be seen without magnification. These tiny

wingless insects survive by feeding on your pet's blood, causing very intense irritation and sometimes allergic skin disease. Fleas also play a major role in transmitting tapeworms in dogs and cats.

Ticks tend to be a problem in the warmer months and commonly live in areas of heathland, moorland and woodland, waiting to attach themselves to passing animals. Ticks feed on your pet's blood and can cause problems in two ways – firstly they can cause a tissue reaction at their site of attachment and secondly they can transmit serious diseases such as Lyme disease and Babesiosis.

Don't let fleas and ticks make your life a misery – Please let us advise you on the best form of flea and tick control for *your* pet!

What to look for when you groom your pet's coat



Specks of flea "dirt" (flea faeces) in the coat are easy to find



Parting the coat reveals a tick in situ with buried mouth parts

