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Keeping your older cat fit and healthy

Thanks to better diets and care in general, more and more of our cats are living to an advanced age and it is now not at all unusual to see cats in their twenties.

As cats grow older, the key to keeping them healthy is *early detection* of any problems. Whilst a number of conditions are common in older cats, they are extremely adept at masking any signs of illness!

So what are the signs to look out for? There are several things that you can keep an eye on and these include:

• **Appetite – any increase or decrease?**

An increased appetite is sadly not necessarily a sign of good health – see box right on hyperthyroidism. Any decrease from normal may suggest a problem as well.

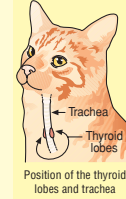
• **Thirst – any increase?** Increased drinking may be seen with a variety of conditions including chronic kidney disease, hyperthyroidism and diabetes mellitus.

• **Eating?** For example, dropping food when eating, or only chewing on one side, can be signs of dental problems.

These are only three of the more obvious signs to look out for! If your cat is showing *any* of these signs, please bring them in for a check-up. The good news is that identifying problems at an *early* stage gives us the best chance of successfully treating (or at least slowing the progression of) many conditions. Please contact us for more information!

Hyperthyroidism in cats

Hyperthyroidism is an example of an illness of older cats and is estimated to affect about 10% of cats over the age of 9 years.



Position of the thyroid lobes and trachea

The thyroid gland consists of two tiny lobes, located on either side of the trachea (windpipe). The thyroid gland produces thyroid

hormone which regulates your pet's metabolic rate.

In hyperthyroidism, *excess* thyroid hormone *speeds up* the body's metabolic rate. This leads to an increased appetite, but despite this most cats will lose weight and become quite unkempt in appearance. Cats may show a variety of other signs such as increased thirst and hyperactivity.



Cat photo: Warren Photographic

Make sure your pet stays worm free!



Did you know that, unless you worm your pet regularly it is often difficult to avoid them acquiring worms? Here are the major ones to treat:

Tapeworms are long segmented flat worms, living in the small intestines where they shed mobile segments containing eggs, which pass out in the faeces. The eggs may then be eaten by an *intermediate* host, including *small rodents* and *fleas*. Cats catch and eat small rodents and pets swallow fleas as they groom, reinfesting themselves with tapeworms.

Roundworms, resembling white pieces of string, also live in the small intestines. They shed thousands of tiny eggs, which pass out in the faeces and pollute the environment. Dogs and cats are re-infected by unwittingly eating eggs in the environment. These eggs also pose some risk to humans if inadvertently swallowed.

Lungworm caused by *Angiostrongylus vasorum*, is becoming more and more widespread over time. It only infects dogs and can cause problems ranging from heart failure, to clotting problems and blood loss in affected dogs. It is also spread by *intermediate hosts* – in this case **slugs and snails**, so dogs that eat molluscs are at risk.

To control worms in your pets *and* the environment you need to: **worm your pet regularly**, use **regular flea control**, try to **prevent dogs eating slugs and snails** and **clear up faeces**. Please let us advise you on the most suitable worming and flea control regime for your pet.



If you would like to receive this newsletter via e-mail, please contact your local practice

Specialist-run clinics: • Ultrasound – for clinical cases and pregnancy scans • Dermatology • Animal Behaviour
• Cats only clinics for those cats who don't like dogs. Please enquire at your local surgery

Fact File: Eye problems in pets

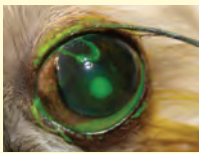


The eyes are very complex organs and thankfully function normally most of the time. Externally the eyes are protected by the eyelids and also the third eyelid (in the corner of the eye). Tears play an important role in keeping your pet's eyes healthy, lubricating the movements of the eyelids, washing out dust particles and providing oxygen and nutrients to the cornea (the clear outermost part of the eye). Tears also contain substances which help fight bacterial eye infections.

Here we look at some common eye problems:

Dry Eye is a condition seen fairly commonly in dogs and is caused by a *reduced or total lack of tear production*. There are many different signs of dry eye and these can develop over time. Key signs are a dull lustreless eye which is often reddened and accompanied by a thick yellowish discharge.

Happily, diagnosis of this condition can be made using a simple test to measure tear production. The good news is that 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.



Fluorescein showing up an area of damage on the cornea

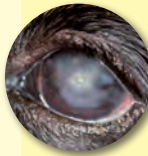
Corneal abrasions (scratches to the surface of the eye) are commonly seen in pets. In cats they are often caused by claw injuries whilst in dogs foreign bodies (such as grass seeds) are frequently the cause. Fluorescein dye is used to show damaged areas, so that the appropriate treatment can be started as soon as possible.

Eyelid tumours are another condition seen commonly in older dogs. They occur on the margin of the eyelid and have the potential to cause marked corneal irritation.

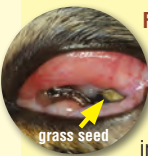
Early diagnosis is the 'golden rule' with eyes; for example early diagnosis and treatment of dry eye can make a real difference to the vision of affected dogs. Without appropriate treatment, eye diseases can progress quickly as the eyes are particularly delicate and can be slow to heal and recover. Don't delay! If your pet is showing *any* symptoms of eye problems, come and see us for a thorough health examination.



Healthy eyes should be bright, clear and free of excessive tears



Dry eye with a dull lustreless eye and mucoid discharge



grass seed

Foreign bodies in the eye such as grass seeds cause intense irritation and need prompt removal or corneal damage can occur



Eyelid tumours are commonly seen in older dogs

Autumn Awareness!



The shorter, cooler days herald the onset of autumn, and as we mourn the loss of another summer – here are some tips to keep your pet safe and disease free at this time of year.

Autumn is a busy time for parasites!

Fleas are still very much a problem, so keep up to date with anti-parasitic treatments. As well as fleas, autumn is *the* peak time for ticks! **Ticks** live in long grass and woodland areas and attach themselves to passing pets. Grooming your dog after a walk enables you to remove them *before* they attach. At the same time you can check for **grass seeds** stuck in the coat which can otherwise penetrate the skin and work their way in, causing pain and infection.

Harvest mites are another problem seen in the late-summer and autumn months. The mites live in long grass and swarm onto passing pets, where they typically congregate on the face, ears and feet. They appear as bright orange dots and are usually a cause of great irritation.

There are risks in the garden too – don't let your pets have access to **fallen fruits, acorns or conkers**, as these can all cause digestive upsets. Also



try to stop your dog eating the last of the **slugs and snails** in the garden, since these can spread the lungworm *Angiostrongylus vasorum*.

When preparing your car for winter, keep antifreeze well away from pets as it is palatable and deadly, and prevent access to any weed killers or other chemicals.



Any spilt antifreeze is **deadly** to pets

Autumn aches: Finally bear in mind that the cooler weather may unmask arthritic disease and joint stiffness, so keep an eye on your pet's mobility and comfort. 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.

Dental disease – is my rabbit affected?



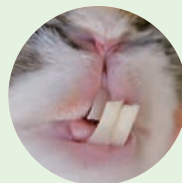
Did you know that it's not just dogs and cats that suffer from dental disease? However, what makes rabbits different is that they have *continuously* growing teeth, growing at a rate of 1-3mm per week!

Dental disease is one of the commonest problems in rabbits and often occurs *secondary* to tooth overgrowth.

The **incisor** (front) teeth should normally meet (see photo left). If they become misaligned, they will grow past each other, leading to feeding problems.

The **cheek teeth** can also become overgrown, developing sharp spikes which can lacerate the mouth. Symptoms commonly include "slobbers" (saliva wetting around the mouth), decreased appetite and weight loss.

Dental disease can be painful and debilitating, so please come and see us if you are worried about your rabbit's teeth.



Misaligned and overgrown incisor (front) teeth.



Overgrown cheek teeth (arrowed) are sharp and can lacerate the gums.