

Do fleas take winter holidays?

THE answer is definitely no! As the article on the back page alludes to, with the warmer summer weather now a distant memory, it's all too easy to lower our guard against fleas! Although it is true that these little pests prefer the summer to proliferate – with modern central heating fleas are now a year round problem!

If your pet was unfortunate enough to attract a few “guests” last summer, you will hopefully have the situation well under control and be tempted to stop treatment. However since adult fleas can lay in excess of 50 eggs per day, a brief flea infestation can result in thousands of eggs being produced. These fall off your pet and are deposited in the carpets and bedding where they can lie dormant for many months, before developing (via larval stages) into adult fleas. Thus for optimum flea control – and peace of mind, treatment should be ideally all year round!

Cat owners beware! Many non-veterinary *canine* spot-ons bought from supermarkets and pet shops contain permethrins or similar chemicals. While these are safe for *dogs*, they should never be applied to cats, since permethrins are very poisonous in cats, causing fits and sometimes even death, despite veterinary intervention.

So, for peace of mind, please ask us to advise you on the safest and most effective flea control for both your pets *and* your home!

Should I have my pet neutered?



THE most obvious reason for spaying or neutering is to prevent adding to the pet population. However there are other real benefits, particularly relating to your pet's health!

In female dogs, heat periods usually occur twice a year and last about three weeks. During this time your dog will be receptive to the advances of un-neutered male dogs in your area. In both sexes the urge to mate can lead to roaming, fighting, aggression, excessive barking, howling and other unwelcome canine behaviours. Worse still, this can result in

your pet becoming a stray and possibly becoming involved in a road traffic accident.

Female cats come into heat as often as every two weeks, and won't stop unless they're allowed to reproduce. Male cats, unless neutered, will mark their territory by “spraying” objects inside and outside the house with strong smelling urine. Additionally they are frequently involved in fights; sexual contact and fighting also risks the transmission of deadly viruses.

In females, spaying, or ovariectomy, is the surgical removal of the animal's ovaries and uterus. As well as preventing seasons (and of course

pregnancies!), spaying also removes the possibility of life threatening uterine infections (called pyometras). The incidence of mammary tumours is also greatly reduced as an added benefit.

In male dogs and cats, neutering involves the removal of both testes. Neutering reduces your male pet's urge to stray, and in dogs can be of help in



reducing excessive sexual drive and also in reducing the incidence of prostate problems. Neutered male cats are far less likely to get into fights and urine spray.

Finally, if you would like any further information on the benefits of neutering your pets, please don't hesitate to ask!

Does my pet have worms?



DOES worming your pet seem like a constant battle? Unfortunately, you can't vaccinate pets against worms, so regular de-worming treatment is the *only* way to ensure your pet stays worm free!

Although there are many varieties of worms, the two major types are roundworms and tapeworms:



Roundworms live in the small intestines and are spaghetti like in appearance. They shed thousands of tiny eggs which pass out in pets' 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 children if inadvertently swallowed.



Tapeworms are segmented in nature and also live in the small intestines. They shed segments containing eggs, which pass out in the faeces. The eggs may then be eaten by a number of *intermediate hosts* – these include fleas and also small rodents such as mice and voles (see photo). Cats catch and eat small rodents, and both cats and dogs swallow fleas as they groom themselves – and in the process, re-infect themselves with tapeworms.



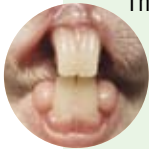
However the good news is that worms can be prevented by following a few simple rules. Worm your pets regularly, use regular flea control, keep gardens clear of faeces, and when out and about, clear up mess and use appropriate bins. Additionally, encourage children to wash their hands properly after playing with pets or in the garden. Finally, please let us advise you on the most suitable worm and flea control regime for your pet!

Dental disease – is my rabbit affected?



YOU may be surprised to learn that, unlike dogs and cats, rabbits have continuously growing teeth – growing at a rate of 1-2mm per week! Dental disease is one of the commonest problems seen in rabbits and usually occurs secondary to tooth overgrowth.

For simplicity, rabbit teeth may be divided into incisors (at the front) and cheek teeth:



The **incisor teeth** should meet (see photo left), thereby ensuring that as your rabbit chews, they will wear down. If they become mis-aligned they will continue to grow, and will grow past each other (see photo upper right). This invariably leads to feeding problems.

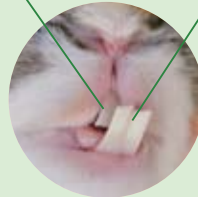
Rabbits can also develop a variety of **cheek teeth** problems. The cheek teeth are grinding teeth, however if they become overgrown they can frequently develop sharp spikes (see photo right), which can lacerate the tongue and cheeks. Symptoms commonly include “slobbers” with saliva wetting around the mouth, a decreased appetite and often marked weight loss.

Please contact us for further information or a check-up! We would also be pleased to advise you on diets to promote dental health.

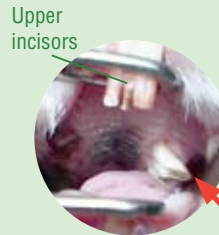
Both incisors and cheek teeth may be affected:

Upper incisors

Lower incisors



Misaligned and overgrown incisor teeth.



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



A seasonal survival guide!

the winter, and this – together with a little Christmas over indulgence, can lead to an expanding waistline in our pets (and sadly ourselves!). One way to try to avoid this is to moderately reduce food levels when pets are less active and to keep an eye on your pet's weight. We are happy to help you monitor your pet's weight and give you dietary advice, since carrying excess weight is very bad for their health.

Remember also that whilst it is tempting to give your pet treats at Christmas, any sudden change of diet can lead to quite severe digestive upsets.



As well as food, pets are often on the look out for anything else they can eat! Christmas decorations – in particular ribbons and tinsel, are very attractive to pets, and if swallowed, may lead to an intestinal blockage.

Out and about, with the cold weather upon us, now is the

time when we all start to feel aches and pains and our pets are no exception. Look out for any limps and difficulties in rising after rest; these are signs that your pet may have some joint stiffness – usually made worse by cold or damp weather. If your pet is showing any signs of stiffness or limping, please get in touch.



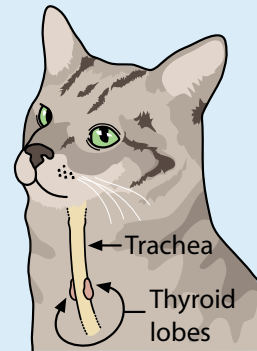
Pets that live outside can find the winter months especially challenging. Rabbits and Guinea pigs are very susceptible to the cold damp weather. It is important to ensure that their hutches are warm, dry and clean, and in a sheltered position. Extra bedding should also be provided and water bottles checked regularly to ensure that they have not become frozen.

Finally don't forget that fleas are a year round menace!

Burn out: Does your cat have thyroid disease?

DID you know that thyroid gland disease is a surprisingly common problem in older cats?

The thyroid gland consists of two tiny lobes, one located either side of the trachea (wind pipe).



The gland produces thyroid hormone which regulates your cat's metabolism. Too much thyroid hormone speeds up the metabolism, whilst too little slows it down.

Over production of thyroid hormone is called hyperthyroidism and is a relatively common condition in cats over 8 years of age. In the majority of cases, this is caused by a 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.

However the good news is that, in the majority of cases, hyperthyroidism can be successfully treated. If you are concerned that your cat is showing any of the signs described above, please come and see us for an appointment!



THE winter months are here again and with this in mind, we've put together some seasonal safety tips to keep your pets fit and healthy!

Christmas is a time of giving, but don't forget that chocolate (a great Christmas favourite!) can be lethal to dogs. The toxic component in chocolate is theobromine which is present in variable concentrations – the higher the cocoa content, the more toxic the chocolate. Specially formulated pet chocolate is the safer (but still fattening!) option for chocoholics feeling sorry for their pets!

Whilst on the subject of food, we are naturally less active in