



SPRING 2011

Your Vet



Blakehurst Veterinary Hospital

653 Princes Highway
Blakehurst NSW 2221
Phone: (02) 9547 2750
Fax: (02) 9546 8498
Web: www.blakehurstvets.com.au
Email: hamish@blakehurstvets.com.au

Our Vets:

DR HAMISH BATHGATE

BVSc GCM(VP)
Special Interests: Surgery, medicine, oncology

DR KATHY MEPSTEAD

BVSc(Hons)
Special Interests: Dermatology, immunology, nutrition

Our Nurses:

Kym, Dee and Jana

Are eager to help you with your appointments, food supplies, flea control and any other questions you may have about the care and welfare of your pet..

Hospital Hours:

We can be contacted between 8.00am and 6.30pm weekdays and between 8.30am and 12.30pm on Saturdays.

After Hours:

Jana is our after hours nurse who lives onsite and cares for our intensive care patients outside of regular operating hours. Jana is in her second year of a Bachelor of Animal and Veterinary Bioscience at Sydney University.

For emergencies at night, on weekends and public holidays, please contact the Animal Referral Hospital on 9758 8666. If you forget the number a recorded message on our number will direct you.

Signs of disease:

Hind Leg Weakness

Vets are commonly presented with a pet that has hind limb weakness. Sometimes this occurs suddenly and is very obvious. In some circumstances, the changes come on slowly and may only be noticed by the vet during routine examination. This is especially common in older pets where hind limb weakness is seen as part of ageing and often perceived to be 'normal' by the owners. These pets may be reluctant or unable to do things they used to (jump on the bed/sofa, leap up retaining walls), be slowing down on walks, or have difficulty in rising.

When a pet presents with hind limb weakness, whether acute or chronic, a thorough history of the problem will be taken. This includes vaccination status, travel history (particularly in the eastern states in Australia where paralysis ticks are endemic), diet and supplements, previous surgeries or illnesses, medications or possible toxins. Speed of onset of symptoms is pertinent. In rapid onset, a toxin may be suspected, whereas a gradual development of symptoms suggests a chronic disease of some form.

As well as physical examination of all the limbs, the movement of limbs and joints are assessed at various walking speeds. We check to see if the pet is trying to carry more weight on the front limbs (more likely with bony or joint pain than true weakness) or if there is a 'hip hike' on one side. We also do a full physical examination looking for a systemic (body-wide) cause of the weakness, as well as a neurological assessment, checking reflexes, muscle tone and whether your pet knows where his feet are all the time. We need to assess whether the weakness is due to an orthopaedic (bony) or joint problem, a neurological (nerve) problem, a muscle problem or a metabolic problem.

Overall, the following conditions are just some that appear as hind limb weakness: hip dysplasia, hip

arthritis, knee arthritis, knee ligament rupture, spinal arthritis, pelvic or spinal trauma, spinal cord disease, snake bite, tick paralysis, metabolic disturbances, anaemia, low blood oxygen, and disease of the junctions between nerve and muscle.



In many dogs, chronic, bilateral (both sides) arthritis of the hips or knees will present as weakness. Sometimes a trial of arthritis medication will clarify the diagnosis. However, if the cause of weakness is uncertain, further tests may be suggested. These may include blood tests and x-rays or more advanced imaging such as contrast x-rays, CT or MRI scans where available. In emergency cases of hind limb weakness, diagnosis may come second to emergency therapy. If snakebite or tick paralysis (a regionally variable risk) is suspected, urgent treatment is required.

If your pet develops signs of weakness in the back legs, either gradually or suddenly, a thorough examination by your vet as soon as possible is advisable for diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

READERS!
Enter our competition and **WIN!**
Details inside

- Testicular tumours in dogs
- Spring – time to spay your cat
- Scurvy in guinea pigs



Emergency!

Testicular Tumours in Your Pet Dog

The occurrence of testicular tumours is one of the main medical reasons for castrating male dogs. Testicular tumours tend to be a disease of older dogs and cryptorchid dogs (dogs with only one descended testicle). The non-descended testicle in a cryptorchid dog is usually located in the abdomen or deep in the groin area. The non-descended testicle is 13 times more likely to develop cancer than a normal descended testicle.

There are three main tumours that can occur in a dog's testicles. Sertoli cell tumours are the most commonly found and are fascinating in that they result in a "feminising syndrome". This is the result of an excess production of oestrogen from the cancer cells in the affected dog's testicle. His penis shrinks, although the sheath that holds the penis becomes pendulous. His nipples and mammary glands become larger and may even begin to produce milk. He may become attractive to other males and may adopt a more feminine way of urinating. Uneven testicular size occurs with the affected testicle becoming larger whilst the non-affected testicle shrinks. Of more concern than an effeminate male is that excess estrogen can have a suppressive effect on bone marrow-

halting production of blood cells. Around 10% of Sertoli cell tumours are malignant and can spread to other parts of the body.

The other common types of testicular tumour are the Interstitial cell tumour and a Seminoma. These are more benign tumours which are less likely to spread.



Any testicular mass should be checked by your vet, as if caught early, all testicular tumours are curable with castration. Left untreated, a small percentage will spread to the rest of the body. Palpable masses in testicles can also be non-cancerous and due to scar tissue and other benign causes.

Spring – It's time to spay you cat

Pet overpopulation is a huge problem and every year thousands and thousands of unwanted cats are euthanised. This is a grim statistic but the real tragedy is that it is potentially preventable through responsible pet ownership and desexing.

The terms "neutering" and "spaying" are used to describe the surgical procedures performed on animals to stop them from breeding. Neutering (for males) involves the surgical removal of the testicles, leaving the penis and scrotum intact. This is also referred to as "castration". In female cats (also referred to as queens), the surgery involves the removal of the ovaries and uterus (ovariohysterectomy). This procedure is commonly referred to as a "spay".

Apart from the obvious benefit of stopping unwanted breeding, spaying can prevent the following illnesses later in life:

- Mammary (breast) cancer – female cats are about seven times more likely to develop mammary tumours if they are not spayed before their first heat cycle
- Pyometra or uterine infections
- Dystocia (difficult birth)



There is no maximum age for desexing your pet, but it is generally recommended that female cats be desexed before their first season.

Most people are surprised at how quickly their pet recovers from surgery, and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies benefits your cat and our community. So be a responsible pet owner and make an appointment with your vet.

Competition for our readers!

WIN a \$50 shopping voucher

- 1) Just answer the following question: Which article did you like best in this issue of Your Vet?
- 2) Tick the box next to your preferred voucher: Angus & Robertson Book Stores Coles Myer Ltd Target Australia Ltd K Mart Australia Ltd JB Hi Fi
- 3) Post with your name and address on the back of the envelope to: Your Vet Voucher Competition, Unit 5/1 Almondbury Road, Mt Lawley WA 6050

THAT'S IT! GOOD LUCK!

The winner of the Autumn competition was Y. Quick of WA.

Must be received by latest post marked 31/10/2011 to be in the running





Ask Your Vet

Signs of Disease: Scurvy in Guinea Pigs

Question: My guinea pig, Elvis, has lost his appetite and is not looking well. His coat is in poor condition and his back legs seem a bit lame. What should I do?

Answer: You are describing common symptoms of Vitamin C deficiency. Vitamin C (or ascorbic acid) is essential to good growth and health. A long-term deficiency of this critical vitamin may lead to scurvy disease.



Look out for these common signs of scurvy:

- Lethargy, weakness, unwillingness to move
- Sore joints and lameness (usually in the back legs first)
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Bleeding gums and nasal discharge
- Rough coat
- Diarrhoea

Keep in mind, some of these signs such as nasal discharge may indicate other serious conditions like a respiratory infection. If your guinea pig is showing some of these signs, do not assume this is "just" a lack of Vitamin C and fail to provide critical veterinary care for a serious illness. Rather err on the side of caution and bring your guinea pig for a check-up.

Scurvy is a disease seen in guinea pigs all too often. It is a progressive condition and the symptoms can be quite severe. The good news is that scurvy is easily preventable.

The average guinea pig needs between 10 and 30 mg/kg daily for good health. However, actual requirements can vary from one guinea pig to another. Young, pregnant, and ill guinea pigs may need more Vitamin C than the average.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are a great source of Vitamin C and fibre. Since the Vitamin C content of the foods we provide can be affected by temperature, sunlight and humidity, it is a best to give your guinea pig generous portions of vegetables. Vitamin C is also available in tablets, but speak to your vet first to ensure that you do not give your pet unnecessary supplements.

Gummy Dogs

You may have noticed that as some dogs get older, their gums may become knobby and their teeth appear to shrink into the exuberant gum tissue. This condition is called *gingival hyperplasia* and is particularly common in Boxers and Collies.

Gingival hyperplasia is not seriously harmful to dogs. However, it does predispose to dental disease as the thickened gum tissue can develop pockets, which trap bacteria.

Regular veterinary dental cleaning followed up with home dental health care are important to minimise bacterial levels and inflammation. In severe cases, the gums can be surgically trimmed back to expose the teeth and remove the deep pockets of abnormal gum. This procedure needs to be performed under general anaesthetic. There are many conditions that can appear similar to gingival hyperplasia but may indicate a more serious disease. It is important to have your vet check any gum problems.

Clever CROSSWORD

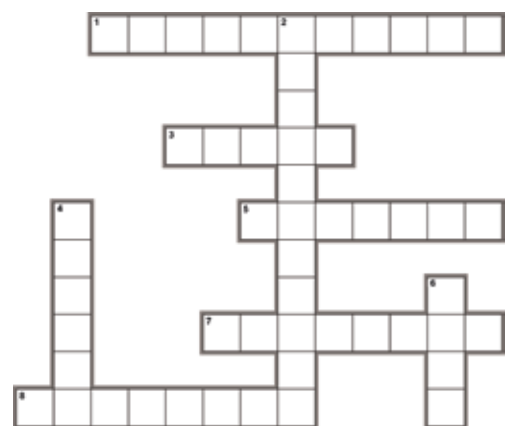
Each of the words can be found in this issue of "Your Vet". Answers are shown on bottom of back page.

Across:

1. The study of birds
3. Female cat
5. Another term for desexing
7. Pertaining to or affecting the body as a whole
8. Difficult birth

Down:

2. Gingival ___ refers to thickened gum tissue
4. Disease caused by deficiency of Vitamin C
6. A flightless bird





Grief and Pet Loss

No one can tell you the right or wrong way to grieve. Grief is as individual as you are and no two people experience it the same way. Some people even experience grief differently at different times of their life, or with different pets. Grief at pet loss can also be complicated if you have had losses in your life in the past, as the new pain can “trigger” the feelings of loss from the past, to affect the present.



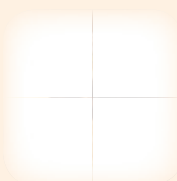
If you are in grief because your pet is dying or has died, take time to do the following:

- Surround yourself with people who understand. Avoid people who say “it’s just a pet”. Talk to friends or family who understand your pain, or talk to your veterinary professionals or counsellors.
- Don’t rush your grief. Healing will take the time that it needs to take. For some the worst pain is over in weeks, for others it may be years. Do not set a time limit for healing.
- Honour your pet with rituals and memorialisations. This may be writing a poem, having a ceremony or creating a shrine. With humans we have funerals to help us with this need. Create something meaningful to honour the loss of your pet.
- Be honest with your children and show them your pain. Try not to “be brave for the kids” as this may be their first experience of loss, and it’s good for them to see mum/dad cry too.

Bird Quiz

How much do you know about birds? Put your avian IQ to the test with this fun bird trivia quiz.

1. What do we call the study of birds?
 - (a) Entomology
 - (b) Ophthalmology
 - (c) Ornithology
2. How many known species of birds exist?
 - (a) 5,000
 - (b) 10,000
 - (c) 15,000
3. What characteristics make birds unique?
 - (a) feathers
 - (b) ability to lay eggs
 - (c) ability to fly
4. Which of the following is *not* a flightless bird?
 - (a) puffin
 - (b) kiwi
 - (c) penguin
5. Which of the following senses is weakest in birds?
 - (a) hearing
 - (b) sight
 - (c) smell



Answers:

1. (c) The study of birds is called ornithology.
2. (b) There are about 10,000 recorded bird species in the world.
3. (a) Birds are the only animals with feathers. Since some birds like ostriches and emus cannot fly, this is not a distinctive characteristic of birds.
4. (a) Puffins can fly.
5. (c) Most birds have poor senses of smell and taste.

Practice Update

Winner Best Pet Care 2011

Thank you for your support

At a glittering July awards night for St George business owners, my nurses and I were thrilled when Blakehurst Vets was announced the winner in the Best Pet Care 2011 category.

This prestigious local award means a great deal to us and we are very honoured to be recognised in this way.

So thank you to my caring nurses who always put animals first, and an extra special thanks to you, our wonderful clients, who trust us with your beautiful pets.

With many thanks and warm regards,

Hamish

Answers to this edition's crossword:
Across: 1. Ornithology; 3. Queen; 5. Spaying; 7. Systemic; 8. Dystopia;
Down: 2. Hyperplasia; 4. Scurvy; 6. Kiwi.