

AUTUMN 2011

your Vet

FREE!
Please
take one



Blakehurst Veterinary Hospital

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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.

Cruciate disease: The great curse

Cruciate ligaments are one of the most important structures within the knee of humans, dogs and cats. Disease of the cruciate ligaments is one of the most common causes of hind limb lameness that vets treat.

While the condition is very common in dogs, it can also occur in cats, sometimes secondary to trauma, and sometimes secondary to obesity, old age and concurrent arthritis of the joints. In dogs there are some vets who also believe in a genetic breed- and sex related link. This problem is so important in dog health that a 2005 study in the USA estimated that dog owners spent US\$1.32 billion treating this disease!

The function of healthy cruciate ligaments in the knee is to stabilise the forces of the knee that might otherwise push the shinbone forwards in relation to the thighbone, and to minimise internal 'twisting'. Along with other structures of the knee, these stabilising ligaments keep the angular canine or feline knee working in a stable fashion without pain.

Rupture of the cruciate ligament occurs when its breaking strength is exceeded, and there are predisposing conditions that can decrease the breaking strength. While a young healthy dog can tear a cruciate during excessive twisting activity (in the '70s a common cause was Frisbee-catching dogs that landed awkwardly), it is increasingly common to see this injury in other dogs that have actually become predisposed to it secondary to other factors.

Degenerative changes due to age and disuse are thought to be implicated in many of the clinical cases. These age-related changes can also make dogs susceptible to both knees being affected. A sedentary lifestyle plus possible obesity in middle age is also implicated.

Acute injury may show as sudden non-weight bearing lameness of a back leg (occasionally with a small amount of weight taken).

Some partial tears are hard to diagnose early, and the initial lameness may settle with rest and medication, only to flare again when arthritis sets in. These patients may show some gradual improvement in pain, due to thickening of the capsule, and changes within it bringing a little stability, then some months later pain will worsen as degenerative arthritis sets in.

Patients with both knees affected may have a shifting lameness, trouble rising or stiff appearance. Occasionally it will initially be thought that they have a spinal problem.

Diagnosis is based on physical examination, palpation of affected joints, bones and local muscles, and the performance of a 'cranial drawer sign' or 'cranial tibial thrust' test.

Significant weakening of the thigh muscles of the affected leg(s) is a common finding. An audible 'clicking' may be heard when the patient walks or the stifle is palpated through range of motion, indicating possible internal tearing. Palpation of the joint compartment may show increased joint fluid or joint capsule thickening.

Blood tests are usually normal, unless the patient has concurrent hormonal diseases, many of which will predispose to obesity.

X-rays are usually performed, and sometimes a joint fluid sample will also be needed. However, sometimes an exploratory surgery via an open technique, or using an 'arthroscope', is the only way to confirm then treat the problem.



The best treatment in dogs over 15kg (and in many under 15kg) is surgery. The ligament cannot be 'repaired', but the joint can be stabilised improving function and reducing pain. There are many procedures available, most of which veterinarians perform in their own hospitals. Some procedures involve entering the joint itself, and some do not. Specialist veterinary surgeons are offering an increasing number of options, which may be of great use in very large breed dogs, or in refractory cases.

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

- Claw Wars
 - Pregnancy diagnosis in dogs and cats
 - Sea hare toxicity
- inside



Who am I?

1. I am a small parrot, native to Australia. Males and females are colour coded – the male having a blue pigmentation across his beak, the female brown. I come in many fancy varieties making me a popular showing bird.
2. I am descended from Scottish herding dogs. I starred in a television series and several movies in which I showed an uncanny understanding of the English language!
3. I am a small rodent and a popular children's pet. I am an unusual breed as I do not have a tail.
4. I am a breed of dog with characteristic wrinkles and folds of loose skin. It is thought I may have originated from Tibet or the Northern provinces of China 2 000 years ago.



5. I am a breed of cat characterised by long fur and a shortened nose giving my face a slightly squashed-in appearance.
6. I am a German breed of dog that comes in three different sizes – giant, standard and miniature. I can come in a variety of colours but the most popular coat colour is a mix of black and grey called salt and pepper. I usually have a beard and eyebrows.
7. I am a breed of cat that is said to originate from the Lake Van region in Turkey. I am a lively, active cat that can have some 'unfeline' attributes such as an attraction to water and, in some, the ability to retrieve like a dog. I have a very soft coat that is mainly white apart from coloured points on my head and tail.
8. I am a short legged, German breed of dog. I was originally bred to flush animals such as badgers and rabbits from their burrows. My coat can be smooth haired, long haired or wire haired. I have a long body that can predispose me to back problems.

9. I am a breed of guinea pig with a 'bad hair day'. My coat has whorls of hair.

10. I am a large, docile breed of horse. I was traditionally used as a draft horse to pull heavy loads but am often now seen representing a brewery in competitions and displays.



Answers:

1. Budgerigar; 2. Rough Collie;
3. Manx mouse; 4. Shar-Pei;
5. Persian; 6. Schnauzer;
7. Turkish Van; 8. Dachshund;
9. Abyssinian; 10. Clydesdale.

Claw Wars!

Clawing in cats is a natural, instinctual behaviour that helps remove old claw sheaths and acts as a marking behaviour. As many frustrated cat owners will testify, these natural behaviours are all well and good until they involve systematic destruction of your furniture!

There are several options that owners can adopt. Firstly, provide a highly desirable alternative to the sofa in the form of a scratching post. Scratching posts can be anything from a wooden log to carpeted constructions. They can be made more appealing by using dangling toys and catnip – and praising and stroking the cat when they use the post. Cats often scratch on waking so the scratching post should be placed close to the sleeping area.

If owners can catch their cat in the act of destroying the furniture, then they should employ some deterrent. Shouting, hand claps and water spray bottles can all be effective in stopping the behaviour. Double-sided sticky tape or contact (applied with the sticky side outwards) can be placed onto the furniture to decrease its appeal.



There are products available that can be glued to the cat's claws and act as a small protective sheath over each claw. These can be quite effective but do rely on a compliant cat, as they have to be replaced regularly.

If the above fails, then consider re-upholstering the sofa – but use a smooth, tightly woven fabric, as this will be less appealing to your cat!

Competition for our readers!

Be in the running to 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 below:

- Coles Myer Ltd
- Target Australia Ltd
- K Mart Australia Ltd
- Angus & Robertson Book Stores
- JB Hi Fi

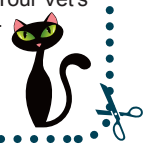
3) Post with your name and address on the back of the envelope to:

Your Vet Voucher Competition
Unit 5/1 Almondbury Road
Mt Lawley WA 6050

Must be received by latest post marked **1 April 2011** to be in the running.

The winner of the competition in Your Vet's Summer edition was L. Allerdyce.

**THAT'S IT!
GOOD LUCK!**





Fun Furry Facts for Pocket Pets

Did you know?

- Guinea pigs have only three toes on their hind feet and four toes on the front feet.
- A female guinea pig can come back on heat and be fertile within 2 hours of giving birth – hence it is best to separate the male and female prior to the birth!
- Guinea pigs (like humans) must eat food that contains Vitamin C – other animals are able to synthesise their own vitamin C. Without enough vitamin C in their diet, guinea pigs will develop scurvy.
- Guinea pigs and rabbits produce two types of faeces – one firm pellet that you clean out of their cage and another softer stool that is eaten directly from the anus. Ingestion of this softer stool or *caecotroph* is thought to aid in the absorption of certain essential dietary amino acids and vitamins.



- A guinea pig pregnancy lasts around 63 days and results in 1 to 5 babies.
- A mouse pregnancy lasts 21 days and can result in anything from 3 to 18 babies.
- The average mouse only lives for 18 months to 2 years.
- Rats and mice with pink eyes have very poor vision compared to their darker eyed mates.
- The front teeth, or incisors, of rats contain iron pigments which make them a yellow-orange colour.
- Rabbit teeth can grown 1.5mm – 3mm in a week.

Pregnancy Diagnosis in dogs and cats

Pregnancy diagnosis in dogs and cats was traditionally achieved via palpating the abdomen, however there are other diagnostic techniques that can give vets more information about the pregnancy, which can sometimes be of great importance to owners/breeders.



X-rays can be used around day 45, because once the foetal bones have started to mineralise they will be visible on a radiograph. However, while an x-ray will often give an accurate count, early death of foeti will not always show on x-ray, although advanced decomposition of foeti may well do so. By then, however, the bitch (female dog) or queen (female cat) may be quite unwell herself, often dangerously so.

An experienced ultrasound operator can detect a pregnancy in the queen (female cat) at about 16 days after mating by locating a 'foetal pole', but some changes can be detected even sooner. In dogs, approximately 20 days after mating, a tiny 'blob' indicating pregnancy might be visible, with heartbeats being visualised as early as 22 days, and foetal movement as early as 31 days.

By 30 days of pregnancy, pregnancy diagnosis in the dog is a fairly simple procedure, even for those veterinarians who do not do huge volumes of reproductive work.

Determining the numbers of foeti ultrasonographically is possible, but if early estimations are made, disappointment might occur if resorption of foeti occurs after ultrasound assessment of litter size.

Remember that not all veterinary practices have an ultrasound machine – it is a highly expensive and specialised piece of equipment, and not all vets use them for pregnancy diagnosis, based on personal experience and preference. However, it is worth discussing this option as a way of tracking your bitch or queen's pregnancy!

The Autumn Years – What to Expect as Your Pet Ages

Ageing is thought to be a genetically predetermined event that is also influenced by environmental factors. For example, large breed dogs age quicker than small breed dogs and lean dogs generally live longer than fat dogs. This enormous variation in the longevity of various breeds of cats and dogs makes it difficult to establish when old age begins, but any dog over eight years and any cat over ten years can be considered a senior.

The ageing process is continuous, irreversible and affects multiple organ systems. Elderly animals have reduced activity levels and have limb weaknesses and degenerative joint disease. They cannot regulate their body temperature well and thus can easily get too hot or too cold. Senility occurs in some and can manifest in many ways – from a loss of learned behaviours such as toilet training to behavioural changes such as irritability, clinginess or a need for frequent naps.



Old animals can have greasy, smelly, dull coats. Hairs start to lose pigment, which will show as whitening around the muzzle, eyes and feet. They may have a decreased ability to smell and taste – these senses are important appetite stimulants. Vision and hearing loss can result in elderly pets being easily startled and disorientated. Senior pets also experience an increased incidence of dental disease and reduced efficiency of digestion resulting in flatulence and constipation.

The good news is that although these conditions can't be cured many can be helped. Regular senior pet checks by your vet can help identify specific problems. Early detection allows the instigation of diets and medications to help slow down the progression of a condition.



Emergency!

Sea hare toxicity!

A unique and unusual problem has emerged on the coast of Western Australia, and coast dwelling pet owners or holiday makers in the east should also take heed!

Sea Hares (in WA these are *aplysia gigantea*), are large marine molluscs that have been identified as having caused toxic reactions in dogs that have licked or ingested them. In the east, the species *aplysia extroadinaria* occurs, but no documented poisonings have been confirmed yet. Sea hares spawn in shallow water in the warmer months, and dead/dying hares end up on the beach. It is during these episodes that most reported canine poisonings have occurred.

The affected dog exhibits signs that look remarkably similar to dogs that have ingested snail pellets, with initial twitching and tremors, progressing to full convulsions, overheating, and if untreated, death.

Treatments include anaesthesia, lavage of the stomach and the administration of an enema. Administration of charcoal products via stomach tube, and aggressive fluid therapy is also ideal. Anticonvulsants have also been used as has a drug called *methocarbamol*.



A similar 'outbreak' has also occurred in NZ, but in this case the dogs had ingested a sea slug called a *nudibranch*, and also exhibited different signs that were discovered to be due to a 'tetrodotoxin', causing completely different symptoms.

At the time of writing, it is uncertain what the actual toxin is within the Sea Hare, but one thing is certain, it would be prudent to discourage your dog from sniffing/licking or chewing on anything found on a beach in WA between the south and the midwest, especially if it looks like a piece of liver! Eastern states pet owners should also be beware. These intoxications are possibly so rare that no association has yet been made in the East – but they may still be occurring or may occur in the future.

Assistance Dogs

Most of us know about Guide Dogs and the wonderful work they do for humanity. We know that these magnificent animals bring so much joy and independence to people who might otherwise be denied it. But how many of us know about the important work of Assistance Dogs Australia?



This charity is involved in the training of labradors and golden retrievers to help people suffering from physical disabilities. The tasks they perform include opening doors, picking up items, and even pressing road-crossing buttons. The dogs ultimately give their owner more confidence and independence, and help relieve some of the loneliness and isolation that disabled people sometimes experience.

One of the goals of Assistance Dogs Australia is to eventually place up to 100 dogs per year!

If the thought of helping this valuable service appeals to you, there are ways you can help. You can sponsor a puppy financially, for about the cost of a cup of coffee a day! You could enrol to 'puppy raise' a pup for up to 18 months in your home. All of its major expenses are covered, and you have the pleasure of time with the dog, and the brilliant feeling of knowing you are helping someone in the future. However, to qualify for puppy raising, you cannot be working full time and your children need to be school age or older. If you like the idea of helping, but can't commit to puppy raising, you could become a puppy sitter or a puppy socialiser.

Assistance Dogs Australia have centres across Australia, so if supporting a wonderful charity based on the power of the human-animal bond appeals to you, why not give them a call, and see how you could help.

Practice Update

Vale Josh

It is with a heavy heart that I inform you that in January, our resident cat Josh died of kidney disease. Josh was the big fluffy Persian who would often greet clients as they walked in the door.

He was a lovely old boy who lived in a brothel in the city before he came to Blakehurst Vets. Kathy, who owned the practice before me, would see Josh at the brothel as part of her house call business.



Kathy tells me that Josh would lounge around the brothel looking beautiful, completely unaware of the shenanigans taking place at his home. When the brothel closed, Josh almost became a homeless stray before Kathy offered to take him to the practice where he could be loved.

For the next ten years, Blakehurst Vets was Josh's home. He was a much loved member of our family and we will miss him dearly.

Warmest regards,

Hamish