

animalism veterinary surgeons

4 St Stephens Hill, St. Albans, AL1 2DS
WINTER 2014

NEWS

Lost without it!

Whilst collars and tags can become snagged and easily lost, the good news is that microchipping is a *permanent* method of identifying your cat, dog, and other pets



A microchip is hardly bigger than a grain of rice and just takes a few seconds to implant. Like a normal injection, it is inserted under the skin at the back of the neck, and once there, lasts a lifetime.

Each microchip contains a unique code, which – together with your pet's details and address, are stored on a central database. Veterinary practices, the police and welfare organisations all have special scanners and will routinely scan stray pets – looking for a microchip.



Do also remember that if you change your contact details to update the database!

Microchipping of dogs (but not cats) is already compulsory by law in Northern Ireland, and will become mandatory in Wales on 1st March 2015 and England on 6th April 2016. There are no plans finalised for Scotland at this time.

So now is the time to get your pets microchipped! Please contact us for an appointment.

Walk-in Surgeries:

Monday to Friday:
9–10am and 6–7pm

Saturday: 9–11 am

Appointments

Monday to Friday:
10.30am–12 noon and 4–6pm

Aches and pains – is your pet affected?



Cold damp weather can unmask signs of arthritic change in dogs and cats, and now is a great time to take a good look at your pets and make sure they are comfortable. Do they seem stiff or lame? Do they have difficulty getting up or lying down? Does it take a while for them to get going in the morning?

If so, your pet will benefit from a check over to identify any problems and work out how best to treat them.

The joints that are most susceptible to arthritis are those permitting free limb movements – called *synovial* joints. The ends of the bones that meet at these joints are covered by very smooth articular cartilage and lubricated with synovial fluid.

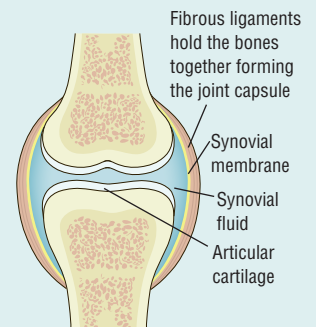
In pets with arthritis, this protective cartilage is damaged and worn away, resulting in exposure of the underlying bone causing pain and inflammation. Secondary “fluffy” new bone is commonly deposited around the joint and may be seen on xray. Affected joints commonly appear stiff, swollen and painful.

Although arthritis cannot usually be cured, there are several things we can do to help.

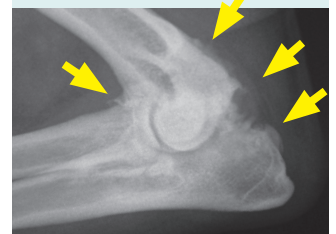
- **Weight control:** overweight pets tend to struggle far more with stiffness and arthritis than slender ones, as the extra weight puts more strain on diseased joints and weight loss can really help.
- **Exercise regimes** can also make a difference. Most stiff dogs benefit from two or three shorter walks every day than one long one from time to time. Other forms of exercise may also be helpful, and hydrotherapy may be useful in some cases.
- **Food supplements and medication** may also be required. We can advise on appropriate food supplements such as those containing EFAs (essential fatty acids) and glucosamine, and can prescribe anti-inflammatory treatments as required.

If your pet is showing any signs of arthritis, please come and see us for a check-up today.

Diagram of a synovial joint



Joint X-rays



The top xray shows a normal healthy elbow joint, whilst the bottom xray shows a very arthritic one with lots of “fluffy” new bone (yellow arrows) around the joint.

Insurance – is your pet covered?



With continual advances in veterinary medicine and surgery, we can now diagnose and treat more conditions than ever before. But how prepared are you if your pet requires more in-depth treatment?

To take a couple of examples, a common injury in medium and larger breeds of dogs is rupture of the cruciate ligament. Surgical treatments for this condition can easily cost upwards of £1,500. And to take a feline example, there are a range of treatments for an overactive thyroid gland, from lifelong medication to radioactive iodine treatment – which can cost in excess of £2,000. These are just a couple of examples – but they illustrate the sort of treatments available for pets.

With appropriate pet insurance we can hopefully ensure that any treatment decisions are made on the basis of *need* rather than cost. So don't take any chances – get your pet insured today!

Our telephone number is 01727 854787 (24 Hours)

The many benefits of regularly grooming your pet!



In addition to the regular health checks your pet receives from us, it's a great idea to perform some form of routine grooming yourself. Get your pet used to you examining their eyes, ears, teeth, feet and giving them a general check-over. This way you can better detect any problems at an earlier stage.

So what may you find when grooming your pet?

Parasites need no introduction to most pet owners! The two major ones to keep a watchful look out for are fleas and ticks.

• **Fleas:** Pets are often very effective at grooming fleas (thus removing the evidence!), so as well as looking for these tiny pests, keep an eye out for any signs of brown flea "dirt" (flea faeces) which also indicates their presence. Fleas are a major cause of skin problems in pets and can also bite humans!

• **Ticks:** The big issue here is the diseases they can transfer to your pet when they latch on and feed on their blood. This is mainly in the form of Lyme disease (which can affect pets and humans alike), but for pets travelling to mainland Europe, many will be exposed to a range of other diseases carried by ticks. Regular grooming and removal of ticks with a suitable tick hook, plus treatment with a product to kill or repel ticks, forms the basis for prevention of tick borne diseases in our pets.

Grass seeds of the meadow grasses are easily trapped in the coats of pets, especially dogs. They often migrate and become lodged in a variety of places including the ear, eyes and between the toes. Regular grooming – especially after walks, is helpful in preventing problems with grass seeds and ticks.

Lumps and swellings are another issue to keep a watchful eye out for. If you find a skin lump on your pet, there are several possible underlying causes – these include abscesses, hernias and tumours. Tumours can be either *benign* – which tend to be slow growing and remain in one place, or *malignant* – which invade the surrounding tissues and may also spread to other parts of the body.

If you find any lumps or swellings it's a good idea to get them checked by us as soon as possible. Timing is everything and delay in appropriate treatment can be the difference between a small treatable mass and one that is far more difficult to treat.

So – when grooming your pet, if you find anything of concern, bring your pet in for a check-over and don't forget to maintain your guard against fleas and ticks and grass seeds!

What to look out for:

Fleas: Specks of flea "dirt" (faeces) in the coat indicates the presence of fleas.



If you collect these brown specks and drop them onto some wetted paper, they will dissolve yielding a characteristic reddish blotch confirming the presence of fleas.

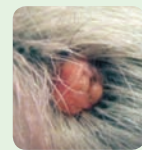
Ticks: Parting the coat reveals a tick in situ with buried mouth parts.



A grass seed has become lodged between the toes in a dog causing a painful interdigital cyst.



Skin lumps: may vary considerably in appearance. Some are fairly obvious, whilst others are harder to detect. Some lumps move with the skin while others feel 'stuck' to underlying tissues.



Skin lump on a dog



Skin lump on a cat



It's cold out there!

With winter nights drawing in, it's important to take good care of all our pets so here are a few seasonal tips:

Outdoor pets such as rabbits and guinea pigs will need extra bedding and food, and hutches should be moved into sheltered areas and covered for frost protection. Keep a regular eye on their water container to make sure it doesn't freeze up.



Turning to dogs, whilst many dogs love the cold and snow, slim fine coated breeds such as whippets find it hard to conserve heat and will benefit from dog coats in cold weather.

In the home, ensure pets have warm comfortable sleeping areas but remember that **fleas** also love their creature comforts as well, so don't drop your guard during the winter!



The festive season brings with it a huge range of hazards for our pets! Items such as **ribbon and tinsel**

are very attractive to mischievous pets and, if swallowed, may lead to a serious intestinal blockage.

Whilst on the subject of edible items, don't forget that **chocolate** can be very toxic to dogs – in general the higher the cocoa content the more toxic the chocolate. Additionally **grapes, raisins** or **sultanas** are all toxic to dogs, making Christmas cakes, puddings and minced pies a serious hazard.



Many pets also love chewing **house plants** however some of these are very toxic! **Lilies** are a particular hazard to cats, with all parts of the plant being toxic.

STOP PRESS: electronic cigarettes pose a very serious risk to dogs that chew them due to high concentrations of nicotine within.

If you have any questions on keeping your pet healthy – please just ask!

Does your pet drink like a fish?



Increased drinking is a very common early sign of a range of diseases, so if you are filling up the water bowl more frequently, its time to stop and work out which pet is drinking too much and make an appointment!

Excessive thirst can indicate diseases ranging from liver or kidney disease, to diabetes and other hormonal conditions (including Cushing's disease in dogs and hyperthyroidism in cats). Infections can also cause increased drinking, particularly pyometra (a womb infection in an unsprayed bitch which also causes signs of illness and lethargy).

So if you think your pet is drinking more than normal, please bring them in for a check-up. As well as giving your pet a thorough clinical examination, urine and blood tests are usually very helpful in making a diagnosis. Radiography and ultrasound of the abdomen may also be of help, allowing an assessment of the size, shape and internal structure of the organs.

The good news is that we do have treatments for many of the conditions mentioned above which will hopefully ease the symptoms and prevent or slow the progression of the disease. Please call us if you are at all worried about your pet!