ST MARTINS VETERINARY CLINIC

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NEWS

WINTER 2018

Practice News

We wish to congratulate **Nakkita** for passing her final examinations with flying colours. She is now a Registered Veterinary Nurse.

Nakkita already had a first class degree in IT from the University of Sheffield but decided that she wanted to work with animals and came to us three years ago for work experience so she would be more likely to be accepted by a training practice and college. She liked us so much she stayed and worked on a voluntary basis for 6 months until a position became available. When she was given the opportunity to go to a training practice, we decided we liked her so much we renewed our training practice status so she could stay with us!

We now look forward to a long relationship so your pets can benefit from Nakkita's new knowledge and skills.

APPOINTMENT TIMES

Mon - Fri: 9–10am, 2.30–3.30pm, 5.30–6.30pm

Saturday: 9–11am

If you are home late from work there is an open surgery most weekdays: 6.30-7pm but phone first for availability.

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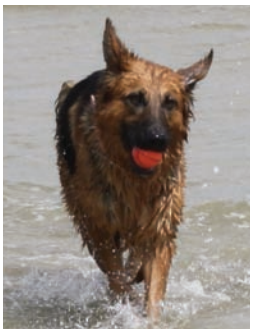
www.stmartinsvetclinic.com

Topics in this issue:

- *Cold weather aches and pains*
- *Q: Where do fleas go in the winter? A: Your home!*
- *Update on lungworm in dogs*
- *Winter weight worries!*
- *Brrr – it's cold out there!*



Cold weather aches and pains

Cold winters can make your pet's joints feel stiff and painful. This can manifest as a reluctance to go on long walks, a stiffening when getting up after lying down or a specific lameness.

The joints most susceptible to arthritis are those permitting limb movements – called synovial joints. The ends of the bones which meet at these joints are covered by smooth articular cartilage. In pets with arthritis, this protective cartilage is damaged, resulting in exposure of the underlying bone, causing pain and inflammation. Secondary new bone is commonly deposited around the joint and may be seen on x-ray (see lower right image).

In many cases, arthritis causes a low grade, constant discomfort. Whilst some pets will develop an obvious limp, many pets, especially cats, will simply slow down, be stiffer getting up and generally rest more; all of which is easy to put down to 'old age'.

Although arthritis cannot usually be cured, the good news is that we now have an expanding range of treatments to help your pet.

First of all, **weight reduction** is absolutely vital. Often sore joints lead to reduced exercise causing an increased waist line! However, even a small loss will make a massive difference to mobility. Have a chat to us about how to help your pet slim down!

Exercise: Many arthritic pets struggle on long walks, so little and often is the key. Vary where you go so they always have somewhere new to explore; mental stimulation is as important as physical, especially for older animals. Try swimming as well, pools for dogs are now very common and it is a great way to strengthen muscles and burn calories while not stressing out sore joints. Simple changes at home can make such a difference: putting mats on slippy floors, providing a super supportive bed and using ramps will all really help.

Many pets also benefit from anti-inflamatory **pain relief** and also increased dietary intake of **glucosamine and chondroitin sulphate** either as a supplement or in the way of prescription food. If you are worried that your pet may have arthritis, please come and see us for a check-up!

X-rays and arthritis

Radiography is commonly used to investigate joint problems.

X-ray of a **normal elbow joint**

Arthritic elbow joint in a dog with lots of "fluffy" new bone (yellow arrows) around the joint, indicative of marked arthritis.

Q: Where do fleas go in the winter? A: Your home!

Did you know that the worst time for flea infestations is actually the Autumn and Winter months? Fleas thrive in warm conditions and thanks to central heating, they don't need to hop south for the winter, they just need to move into your living room.

Fleas can make their way into our homes in all sorts of ways; on our pets, on us, or just hopping in by themselves. Did you know that fleas can jump 20cm into the air – so your front step is no barrier to them! They lay their eggs in protected places like under furniture or in the cracks of laminate floors and those eggs can survive for months, waiting to be activated by warm conditions (remember that central heating?!) and the presence of pets spending more time inside. This is why flea infestations can appear to come out of nowhere!

So, it is vital to protect against fleas all year round! Come and have a chat to us about the best ways to do this and you can stop your home from being a flea's winter paradise!

APPOINTMENTS AND EMERGENCIES 01895 444400 • Please note that the shop is open all day weekdays and Saturday mornings • House calls available • In addition we can offer free delivery on bulk orders of over £40

Update on lungworm in dogs

Lungworm or *Angiostrongylus Vasorum*, is a parasite that can affect dogs and also local foxes. It can cause significant disease and in some cases, be fatal. Unfortunately, cases are becoming more common throughout the UK and Ireland and it is therefore very important to be aware of lungworm and how you can help protect your pet from this parasite.

Dogs can be infected with lungworm larvae carried by **slugs and snails** (which act as intermediate hosts). Slugs and snails can be inadvertently eaten in grass, soil or whilst playing with toys in the garden. Lungworm larvae can even be found in the trail that snails leave behind in your garden. The disease is commonest in young dogs that eat or play with slugs and snails, and in dogs that eat or drink outside and may have had slugs or snails in their bowls.

Electron micrograph of an adult lungworm

Lungworm are swallowed as tiny larvae, which migrate into the circulation of the liver and travel to the right side of the heart. Here they develop into adult worms (see photo left) which can build up in the heart. Here the adults mate and produce eggs. The eggs hatch into larvae and then migrate into the lung tissue. These larvae are coughed up and are passed out into your dog's faeces to re-infect molluscs. When in the body the larvae cause significant lung tissue damage, often causing a cough, breathing troubles and lethargy. This can result in bronchitis, heart failure and spontaneous bleeding. Affected dogs often become weak and lethargic, go off their food, and may cough, vomit, or pass blood. The disease can be so severe as to be fatal but, if diagnosed early, can be treated successfully. Blood or faecal testing can give rapid diagnostic results.

Lungworm is best prevented by using an appropriate wormer at monthly intervals. Fortunately it can't be transmitted to humans but it is very important to make sure your pet is adequately protected. Please contact us at the practice if you are concerned your pet is not covered.

Lungworm photo: courtesy Bayer.

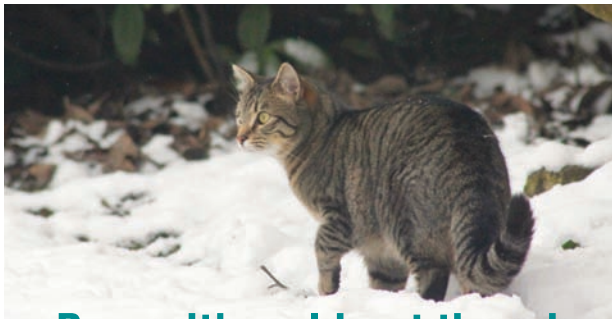
Winter weight worries!

Shorter days, inhospitable weather, and the lure of a cosy sofa all conspire against us and our pets in the winter months, leaving both pets and owners prone to putting on a few unwanted pounds. This is a problem because while it is all too easy to gain weight, it isn't nearly as easy to lose it!

Long term, this can have health risks since carrying excess weight can cause or worsen a range of conditions including skin, heart, respiratory and joint disease. Your pet may also be more prone to develop problems such as raised blood pressure, diabetes and pancreatitis.

So – now is the perfect time to assess your pet's weight! Dogs should have a visible 'waist line', with ribs that can be felt on palpation. By contrast, if you can pinch an inch or more, and if your pet's tummy sags down, then a diet is probably in order. We are here to help and can weigh your pet and can advise you on their ideal weight. Additionally, by visiting the surgery every few months we can use the scales to keep an eye on your pet's weight.

Special diets and feeders, advice on exercise, treats, and calorie management all have their part to play and will give you the best chance to get your pet's weight back under control. The good news is that as your pet loses weight, the benefits of increased healthiness and vitality are usually seen quite quickly. So, if your pet has gained weight, or seems to have slowed down, then why not give us a call – we are here to help!



Brrr – it's cold out there!

With the colder weather setting in, it's a good idea to start making plans to avoid some Christmas calamities and keep our pets healthy throughout the festive season.

Winter walks: In order to avoid pets expanding their waistline, getting out and about as the weather cools is essential. However make sure that your pets are adequately prepared; when outside they may need to wear waterproof and warm jackets, especially if they are older or have thin coats. Some salt mixtures on paths, and also snow building up between the paws, can cause limping and pain. So, do check your pet's feet regularly and make sure they are washed and clean on return from a walk. Whilst out and about, make sure you play some games to give your pet mental as well as physical exercise.

Toxic alert: Anti-freeze poisonings increase at this time of year because we use it more in our cars. Although it is highly toxic, it tastes very sweet and pets, in particular cats, will drink it readily. Make sure your car isn't leaking any fluid and keep cans or bottles of it well out of reach and cleaned on the outside. Even a few licks can be fatal.

Outdoor pets: Rabbits and guinea pigs are ideally brought into a heated garage or shed, or moved inside. Make sure they have plenty of bedding and that their water supply is fresh twice daily. Check your small furries at least once a day to make sure they are bright, eating and well. If you have a rabbit or guinea pig who lives alone, now is the ideal time to think about getting a friend of the same species so they have someone to cuddle up with!

Foliage alert: Some plants such as ivy, poinsettia, holly berries and mistletoe can also cause stomach upsets. Lily petals and pollen are very toxic to cats. They may brush against the pollen and lick it off their fur, which can cause kidney failure.

Festive alert: Pieces of string, tinsel and bones from turkeys should be kept well out of reach to avoid an intestinal blockage and the possible need for life saving surgery. Baubles and lights, if broken and eaten, will cause serious damage to your pet. Similarly we see lots of problems at this time of year from pets eating things like chocolate, Christmas cake and mince pies.

So – enjoy the festive season and follow these tips to keep your pets safe and healthy. As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch!

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