

### Spring alert!

This Easter, with lots of human treats around, it is important to make sure you are aware of common items in your home that are poisonous for your pet, and where possible, avoid any exposure.



Dogs are very susceptible to **chocolate** toxicity. The stronger the chocolate, the more dangerous it can be and it may cause fatal neurological signs.

Dogs also enjoy a good snuffle through handbags and often find packets of gum and tablets. **Sugar free chewing gum** containing **xylitol** can cause life threateningly low blood sugar levels.



Xylitol is also used as a sweetener in home baking, and cakes made with it, could prove lethal to dogs.

**Sultanas and raisins** – found in hot cross buns, fruit cakes and the like, are also toxic for your dog. They can cause symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhoea and, in severe cases, kidney failure.

Cats are less vulnerable to poisonings but they can still occur.



**Lilies** are beautiful but very toxic to cats. Chewing the leaves or grooming pollen off their coats can lead to severe kidney failure.

**Anti-freeze** (ethylene glycol) is another, often fatal, toxin. It has a sweet taste, but even in small amounts, will cause kidney failure.

**Permethrin spot-ons:** Many canine spot-on flea products bought from supermarkets and pet shops contain permethrins. While these are safe for dogs, they should *never* be applied to cats, since they are **extremely** poisonous to cats.

Signs of poisoning can often be vague so contact us at once if you notice any signs of unusual behaviour or illness.



*So what are the major types of worms we need to be aware of?*

Roundworms and tapeworms inhabit your pet's intestines, interfering with food absorption and may also be a cause of gut inflammation, weight loss and diarrhoea.

**Roundworms** are spaghetti-like worms that are brown to white in colour. Many pups and kittens are born infected with roundworms because they cross the placenta and are also in the milk. Infected adult dogs show very few signs of roundworms but they can make young pets very poorly. The eggs are also shed in the faeces and are easily picked up on walks. Roundworms can also infect people and have the potential to cause serious health problems, especially in children. Occasionally you might see roundworms in your dog's vomit or faeces, looking like strings of spaghetti.



**Tapeworms** can be seen in faeces as white flat segmented worms in dogs and cats. They cause a failure to thrive in young animals, and symptoms such as diarrhoea and vomiting. Tapeworm eggs may be eaten by *intermediate hosts* – these include **fleas** and **small rodents**. This is why cats that catch a lot of mice will commonly be infected by tapeworms. Pets swallow fleas by grooming themselves and become infected in this way.

**Lungworm:** This parasite is becoming increasingly common in our dog population. Dogs are infected by eating slugs or snails carrying lungworm larvae, or even just eating grass that has slug or snail slime on it. Lungworm are swallowed as tiny larvae which migrate to the right side of the heart where they develop into adult worms. Here they produce eggs which hatch out into larvae which migrate to the lungs causing coughing. The larvae are then coughed up, swallowed and passed out in the faeces. Lungworm can also cause life-threatening clotting problems.

The good news is that we have a range of tasty treats and simple spot-ons that will help in the fight against these pesky parasites! Please ask us for more information!

### Worms are the worst!

We all know that we should worm our pets regularly, but it doesn't always seem important, especially when our pets appear perfectly fine! However, worms aren't always obvious and can cause a great deal of damage and general ill health.

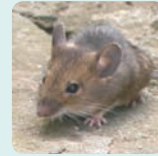
#### What to look out for!



**Typical Roundworms** – in this case *Toxocara canis*



**Tapeworm segments** – e.g. *Taenia taeniaeformis*



Both small rodents and fleas act as intermediate hosts for tapeworms.



**Electron micrograph of an adult lungworm**

### Bunny boosters – is your bunny vaccinated?



Vaccinating your rabbit is very important since the infectious diseases we protect them against are extremely serious and often fatal.

**Myxomatosis** is probably the one you have heard of. It is common amongst wild rabbits and deadly. It is passed by fleas, which can travel from the countryside into our homes and gardens on us, other pets and wildlife. Protection by vaccination is the only cure.

**Viral Haemorrhagic Disease** is also extremely serious. It is spread by direct contact but also survives in the environment for months and can be carried by wildlife and people. There are now two strains, RVHD1 and RVHD2, and both need vaccinating against – given at least two weeks apart. Rabbit vaccinations are usually given annually to ensure full protection. They are safe, effective and as bunnies are extremely good at hiding illnesses, the health check they get is also important. If you would like any further information or an appointment, please just give us a call!



## Caring for your elderly cat

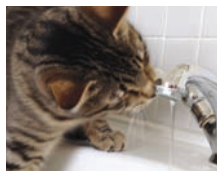
Elderly cats can seem to have the ideal life; snoozing in a cosy bed, eating when they fancy and occasionally demanding attention. They can appear so content, it is easy to assume that they are well in themselves, but their peaceful appearance can be deceiving!

In their twilight years, our feline friends are vulnerable to many illnesses, but are extremely good at hiding the signs. So, we have to be super vigilant to ensure they don't suffer in silence. Regular health-checks are a good way of helping to keep your cat in top shape and pick up medical conditions early, when they are easier to treat. Here is a list of things to keep an eye on:

**Sore Joints:** One of the most common problems for geriatric cats is painful arthritis. The vast majority will suffer with it to some degree but spotting the problem is a challenge. Cats are natural athletes, so they will still be agile to a certain degree, they will jump, climb and play, but with less freedom and frequency. You may notice they don't sleep in a previously preferred spot, if it is higher up, and they hesitate before jumping both up and down. Perhaps they are sleeping more, don't put a lack of activity down to age, it could be pain or illness. Is your cat a little more grumpy? Less keen to play or interact with the family? Not grooming themselves? Contact us to arrange a check-up.

**Eating habits:** Dental disease is very common in older cats and can be extremely painful. Older cats with dental disease may become fussy with their food, chew on one side, or refuse dry food. However, in many cases they will show no signs at all, making regular dental-checks vital. If your cat becomes fussy with food, contact us to make an appointment.

**Weight loss:** Notice your cat looking slimmer? In senior felines, weight loss is often a sign of underlying illness, but in many cases, the gradual nature of the drop makes it difficult to spot. We are very happy to weigh your cat, and this is a great way to monitor their health if you can't weigh them at home. You can also monitor their 'body condition score', so ask us how to do this to keep an eye on their level of fat and muscle. A common cause of weight loss in older cats is thyroid disease. An overactive thyroid will cause your cat to lose weight despite a ravenous appetite. The good news is that thyroid disease can be diagnosed from a simple blood test and there are a range of treatment options to manage this condition.



**Drinking more:** Drinking more than usual may be an early sign of some medical conditions such as kidney disease and diabetes, both of which are fairly common in older cats. Cats naturally drink very little, so if you see your cat constantly at the water bowl, please get in touch for a check-up. Equally, if the litter tray suddenly seems heavy or your cat is urinating in the house, let us know.

**Dementia:** We hear about this debilitating condition in humans and it can also affect cats. Affected cats may yowl in the night (this can also be a sign of other problems such as high blood pressure), seem confused, interact less with the family or start to urinate or defaecate in the house. If your cat starts keeping you up, please let us know. A few health tests and some treatment can often get you both back to having restful nights.

If you notice any of the above signs, please get in touch to book an appointment for a health-check. The good news is that modern diagnostic tests, combined with an expanding range of treatments, can greatly improve the quality of life of your elderly pet.

## Diet dilemmas!



With so many choices on the market, it can be quite a minefield finding the ideal diet for your pet. The most important thing is that the diet for your pet needs to be balanced and in the correct quantities.

To help with this, many pet foods have a selection of age ranges, such as puppy or kitten, junior, adult and senior. These are to help tailor the calorie and nutritional contents. Some also have specially designed breed types or breed sizes, such as giant and large breed dogs. It is very important that your pet stays a healthy weight to reduce illnesses in later life. Neutered diets and lower calorie diets are available to help maintain a balanced weight.

Complete diets can be in wet or dry forms, so you can choose what is best for your pet depending on their tastes.



Some diets (or kibble) are designed to help with dental disease, which can be a complete diet or fed as a supplement.

If your pet has an illness, a specific veterinary diet may help with your pet's condition. Kidney diets are low in some toxins and waste products to reduce the chemicals your pet's body needs to eliminate. Intestinal diets are designed to help with short and long term digestive issues. Special hydrolysed diets mean that specific proteins have been broken into small pieces so that they can help reduce symptoms from skin allergies. With diets designed for fur balls in cats, diabetes and liver disease, the choice is endless.

If you need any advice regarding your pet's diet, please don't hesitate to ask!

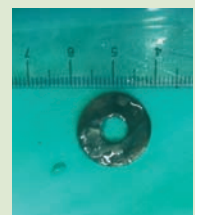
## The assurance of insurance: is your pet insured?



Knowing that your dog, cat or rabbit is insured can be a weight off your mind, especially if your pet has a sudden accident or illness and you are faced with an unexpected vet bill.

There are different types of cover to choose from. The top cover is a **lifetime policy** where your pet is covered for a condition for life, usually up to a certain amount of money per year. A **time-restricted policy** means that you can claim per condition, usually for 12 months only. If your pet has an on-going condition such as diabetes or arthritis, the cover expires after the time period. A **condition-restricted policy** means that you can claim up to a certain amount per condition. **Accident only insurance** is a basic cover only. Insurance won't cover a condition if it has occurred before the policy was started. This means it is useful to choose good cover for your pet as soon as possible.

We highly recommend insuring your pet since there are a huge number of surgical and medical conditions that can be very costly to treat.



Pets commonly swallow items which require surgery to remove them, however it's not every day that a kitten swallows a washer! Happily, surgery resolved the issue for this young cat.

In addition to the need for unexpected surgery, many *medical* conditions (such as skin infections, ear disease, kidney or heart disease – to name just a few!) can also be very costly to treat.