



Seasonal Itches!

As the weather improves and we head out of lockdown, spare a thought for our pets who often start to itch more – here we look at a couple of possible causes:

Skin allergies are reasonably common in dogs, especially at this time of year. Pollens from plants, grasses and trees irritate the skin. The most common places for sore spots to develop are typically the feet, stomach, armpits, groin and ears. Underlying skin allergies are also a very common cause of ear disease (see back page article). Affected areas are usually pink and variably itchy.



Allergic irritation and foot chewing in a dog.



Fleas are another seasonal culprit! They can be found in abundance on wild and domesticated animals, jumping effortlessly onto your pet. Affected pets will often groom excessively, making fleas paradoxically hard to find! A tell-tale sign is often evidence of small black granules of flea "dirt" (see below).



Flea infestations in cats often lead to over grooming, commonly with crusting.



Specks of flea "dirt" (flea faeces) in the coat strongly indicate a flea problem.

So, if your pet is showing signs of skin problems, come and see us for a check-up! We can check for fleas (and a range of other possible parasites) and advise you on the best preventative products. Diagnosis of allergies is more tricky, but blood tests and skin testing can help us identify the cause. It is usually difficult to *cure* allergies, but modern treatments can be very effective in making pets less itchy.

Should I have my pet neutered?



As life slowly starts to return to normal after a tumultuous year, one of the things to consider as a pet owner is the subject of neutering. In fact – as well as preventing unwanted pregnancies, there are a wide range of other benefits to neutering and we've outlined some of these below:

Dogs: In female dogs, heat periods (or seasons) usually occur twice a year and last about three weeks. In both sexes, the urge to mate can lead to roaming, which can result in them becoming lost, injured or worse. There are also health benefits to neutering such as a large reduction in the risk of them developing mammary (breast) cancer if the neutering is done at a young age and also the prevention of otherwise life-threatening infections in their uterus, which occurs in around 1 in 4 entire bitches.

In male dogs, castration eliminates the risk of testicular cancer and makes prostate problems less likely as well. Also, for some it can have very positive effects on their behaviour.



Cats: Female cats will start their first season from as early as four months of age and may come into heat every three weeks during the breeding season (in the spring and summer months).

By neutering your cat early, as well as avoiding unwanted litters of kittens, you will also reduce the risk of mammary cancer later in life, which is often aggressive in cats. Un-neutered male cats are more commonly involved in fights, putting them at increased risk of viruses such as FIV and Feline Leukaemia. They also mark their territory by "spraying" objects inside and outside your house with strong smelling urine.

As you can see there are a wide range of benefits to neutering your dogs, cats, rabbits and guinea pigs. Contact us for further information or to book your pet in for an operation.



What about 'small furrries'?

Guinea Pigs are sociable animals and should be kept in groups or pairs; males reach sexual maturity at 9-10 weeks, females even earlier at 4-6 weeks so it is essential that the male, at least, is neutered to prevent unwanted pregnancy. Housing guinea pigs with rabbits is not recommended.

Rabbits will also generally benefit from being neutered. Both sexes make much better, calmer pets and are also much more likely to live peacefully with others. Entire rabbits will often fight, even if related. Also over 80% of older un-neutered female rabbits may suffer with, and often die from, uterine cancer.

Don't get caught out by Kennel Cough!



As the weather improves and pets and their owners get out and about more, so the risk of Kennel Cough increases. In fact – wherever dogs meet (out on walks, at the beach, training classes, dog shows and of course boarding kennels), this highly contagious cough is readily spread.

More correctly called "infectious tracheo-bronchitis" the condition can involve several viral components, plus a bacterium – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. It causes a harsh cough, an inflamed throat and sometimes nasal discharge. The signs can be dramatic, and it is not uncommon for owners to become concerned their pets have something stuck in their throats. The cough is often self-limiting, but can still persist for several weeks.

To give your dog the best protection against Kennel Cough, a vaccine is available to reduce the risk of developing the disease and reduce clinical signs. This is given *in addition* to your pet's standard vaccines. Please contact our helpful team for further information.



