

NEWS



SUMMER 2023

Orchard Health Plan

The affordable way to keep your pet fit and healthy.



For peace of mind, our health plan provides you with all your pets' preventative healthcare needs - including treatment for fleas, ticks, lungworm and intestinal worms, vaccination and an additional six monthly check.

This makes it ideal both for new pets just joining your family, and older pets that benefit from more regular vet assessment.

Plans are available for dogs, cats and rabbits **from £10.99/month**. If you would like further information on our health plan or any of the topics included in this newsletter, please ask a member of the practice team. We are happy to help!

Booster alert!

For dogs and cats, a yearly booster vaccination is vitally important!

Dogs should be vaccinated against a range of infectious diseases. One is **parvovirus**, which causes severe vomiting and diarrhoea and can be fatal. We also vaccinate against **Distemper, Hepatitis, and Leptospirosis**. We can also protect dogs against **Kennel Cough**.

Cats: We recommend vaccinating cats against the following:

Cat Flu: calicivirus and herpesvirus are components of 'cat flu'. **Feline Leukaemia** is usually fatal.

Feline Enteritis is thankfully rare, mainly due to vaccination.

Vaccination represents a safe and effective way to protect dogs and cats. If your pet's boosters are out of date, please call us today!



Summer itches!

Ahh... the warm sunny days and the balmy evenings – always something to look forward to! However, the warmer weather is not only enjoyed by us and our pets, it is also the time when parasites that cause skin irritations flourish as well!

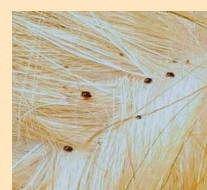
Fleas: As the weather warms up, fleas can be found in abundance on wild and domesticated animals, jumping effortlessly onto your pet. Affected pets will often groom excessively, making fleas paradoxically hard to find! A tell-tale sign is often evidence of small black granules of flea faeces – often called flea "dirt". Many pets aren't particularly sensitive to flea bites, so just because they aren't showing any signs of a problem, it does not mean your pets aren't infected! At this time of year, without protection, it is reasonable to assume that most pets will be carrying a few fleas!



Harvest Mites are another seasonal concern. They are most active between July and November and are found in woodland and grassy areas where they swarm onto passing pets. Some animals are particularly sensitive to the mite saliva and can be very itchy. These tiny mites are bright orange in colour and are often found on the feet, legs, armpits, genitals, tummy and occasionally the ears.

Could it be an allergy? An important differential to parasitic itches (which are very common!) is an **allergic** itch. 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). The skin in affected areas will become pink and the pet will start to excessively lick, scratch or chew at them, causing more damage which often triggers bacterial infections, making the problem even worse.

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.



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



The bright orange Harvest Mites often cluster together and are commonly found between the toes. Right: microscopic view of a tiny Harvest mite.



Rabbit teeth – a growing issue!



Did you know that rabbits are unusual in that they have open rooted teeth? This allows their teeth to continuously grow at a rate of 1-3mm per week, enabling wild rabbits to grind and chew large quantities of tough and very fibrous grass and plants.

Problems are often encountered in pet rabbits fed a diet of mainly pelleted food, with insufficient roughage. The edges of their continuously growing teeth do not wear down properly and they can develop sharp points which eventually cause ulcers on the inside of the mouth and tongue, which can result in inappetence, dribbling and weight loss.

If you notice any signs of dental problems, please come in for a check-up. We can also advise you on diet regimes aimed at promoting optimum dental health.

Oral exam reveals problems:



Overgrown cheek teeth (arrowed) are sharp and can lacerate the gums.

A word in your ear!



Ear problems seem to be a very common issue for dogs, cats and rabbits.

Anatomically, both animal and human ears have three major components: The **outer ear** with a pinna – to

gather sound waves, which then pass down the external ear canal to the ear drum where the sound is transmitted as vibrations to the small bones of the **middle ear**, and then onto the **inner ear** where it is turned into electrical signals which are passed onto the brain and perceived as sound.

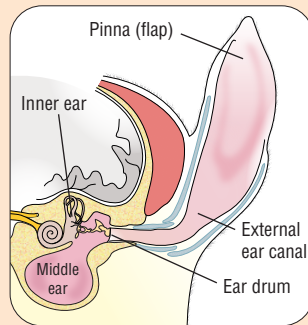
Most of the time your pet will have clean comfortable ears. You can gently open the ear flap and check the ear looks clean, the skin does not look sore, and check for unusual odours.

The vast majority of ear problems in pets occur in the *external ear canal* – termed *otitis externa*. Signs of otitis externa commonly include ear rubbing, head shaking, and reddened, irritated skin lining the external ear canal. Additionally there is often a creamy discharge which may be very foul smelling.

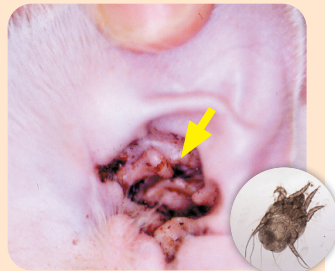
Underlying causes of otitis externa can include:

- **Ear mite** infestations with *Otodectes cynotis* are commonly seen in puppies and kittens and is usually associated with a crusty brown discharge. Rabbits can be infected with the rabbit ear mite – *Psoroptes cuniculi*.
- **Localised allergies** affecting the skin lining the external ear canal are another common cause, leading to scratching, allowing opportunistic bacterial and fungal infections to occur as well.
- **Grass awns** are another common problem and often present with sudden-onset head shaking.

In order to effectively treat otitis externa it is very important to identify the underlying cause. Some, such as ear mites or foreign bodies are easily identified and treated. However, over time, the underlying cause is commonly obscured and made worse by *secondary* opportunistic bacterial and fungal infections, and the longer ear problems go on, the harder they are to effectively manage. If you would like any further information or are concerned your pet's ears are causing problems, please bring your pet in for a check-up.



A typical ear in cross section. Most ear problems occur in the external ear canal



Opening to the vertical ear canal in a cat with a crusty brown discharge typical of **ear mites** *Otodectes cynotis* (inset)

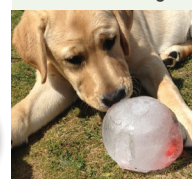


In rabbits, ear mite infestations with the rabbit ear mite (*Psoroptes cuniculi*) present with thick, flakey crusting in the external ear canal.



Finally, the summer is here, but it brings with it its own particular set of challenges and potential problems. Here are a few tips to keep your pet fit and well at this time of year:

Stay cool! Heat can be a real killer for many pets and for this reason it's a good idea to walk dogs in the morning or evening – before 8am and



after 5pm. If you have space, dogs love cooling down in a paddling pool. Frozen ice treats (photo left) are also a good way of cooling your dog down on a hot day.

Guinea pigs and rabbits are also at risk of heat stroke and it is vitally important that they have access to lots of shade at all times, plus ample cool water – preferably in a bowl (not a bottle).

UV Alert! Cats are natural sunbathers and for many cats this causes no problems. However cats with white ear tips and noses are prone to sunburn and this can lead to cancerous changes over time. High factor sun block applied to the at-risk areas helps to minimise this risk. Please get in touch if you are concerned.



Ear tip of a cat showing early cancerous changes

Flies are another summer hazard. Flies are very attracted to rabbits if they have soiled bottoms – here they lay their eggs which rapidly hatch out into flesh eating maggots. It is important to check bunnies' bottoms on a daily basis and call us at once if you are worried.

Tick alert! Ticks are most active from March to October being found especially in woods and long grass. Ticks can carry a range of diseases as well as being irritating to pets. It's important to check your pet after every walk to spot if any ticks have become attached. Ticks can be removed using a special tick device or in the surgery. There are a range of products to kill ticks; using prescription strength veterinary only medication (which very rapidly kills ticks) is key to preventing a range of deadly diseases that ticks can transmit.

So – enjoy the summer months, have fun and keep your pets safe. Plus, remember to check your pets' coats for pesky **grass awns** which can become trapped and cause problems. We are here to help, so if you would like any further information on summer hazards, please just ask a member of the practice team.



Anal gland issues – is your pet affected?



Do you see your dog scooting their bottom along the floor or nibbling at their tail? This may indicate blocked anal glands.

Your dog or cat has two small sacs that sit to the left and right of your pet's bottom, called anal glands. These glands produce a brown liquid, which has a distinctive strong and fishy scent. Your pets express small amounts of this liquid to mark their territory when going to the toilet, and this is why our pets often greet each other

nose to tail! The glands drain upwards, which can mean that in some animals they may struggle to empty and become too full. This is not usually a problem, but some pets may start 'scooting' due to the irritation, chew at their tail or seem uncomfortable. This can be a sign these glands need emptying by a veterinary professional.

Some pets have to visit us on a regular basis for expression. We sometimes recommend trying a diet change or stool hardeners (fibre) to help. If you need any more information, please just call!