



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 £11.99/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!

Easter alert!

Easter is often a time for indulgence, with many tempting treats around the home. While these are enjoyable for us, some can be very dangerous for our dogs. Here we take a look at some of the toxic hazards at this time of year:

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

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. Grapes are similarly a hazard for dogs.

Xylitol is an artificial sweetener, often used as a sugar-substitute in bought and home baked cakes. Xylitol is extremely toxic to dogs causing life threateningly low blood sugar levels. Contact us if you have any concerns.



Keeping your pet worm free!

Worms are something all pet owners need to be aware of, since unlike many infectious diseases, we cannot vaccinate against them! Pets are continually exposed to worms through their environment, so regular worming

treatment is the only effective way to keep them protected. There are three main types of worms that commonly affect pets and can be treated: roundworms, tapeworms and lungworms.

Roundworms are most commonly found in young animals but can infect adults as well. Many puppies and kittens are born infected with roundworms because they cross the placenta and are also in the milk. Roundworms look like long strings of spaghetti but are usually only seen if there is a heavy burden or you give your pet a dewormer. Adult roundworms shed eggs which are passed out in your pets faeces and infect the environment and pets can become re-infected by unwittingly eating the eggs, often whilst grooming. Additionally the eggs can pose a risk to humans if accidentally ingested.



Tapeworms are long flat, segmented worms which live in the small intestines.

They shed small mobile segments that pass out in the faeces and are often found around the tail areas of cats. As the segments break down they release eggs into the environment. These eggs may be eaten by 'intermediate hosts' – these include fleas and small rodents such as mice and voles. As a result, cats who are "mousers" will commonly have tapeworms. Similarly pets swallow fleas as they groom, and so re-infect themselves with tapeworms.

Lungworm (*Angiostrongylus vasorum*) is becoming increasingly common in dogs and can cause life-threatening disease. Slugs and snails act as 'intermediate hosts' and are commonly infected with immature lungworm larvae. If infected slugs and snails are eaten by a dog, the larvae migrate to their lungs. Here they develop into adult worms up to 2cm in size. The adults live and lay eggs inside the vessels of the lungs and the right side of the heart, causing symptoms such as coughing and exercise intolerance. Larvae migrate into lung tissue, causing blood clots, bleeding problems and even sudden death. The larvae are coughed up and pass out in the faeces where they are eaten by slugs and snails, so continuing the lifecycle.

The good news is that there are a variety of **veterinary licenced** treatments to prevent worm infections which are easy to administer and suitable for dogs and cats. Please contact us to find out how we can help you best protect your pets.

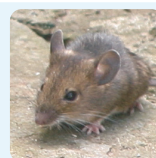
What to look out for!



Typical Roundworms – in this case *Toxocara canis*



Tapeworm segments – e.g. *Taenia taeniaeformis*



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

Make sure your rabbit is vaccinated!



The warmer spring and summer months are also a peak time for the spread of a couple of life-threatening infectious diseases in rabbits:

Myxomatosis can be caught from an infected rabbit or from being bitten by fleas or mosquitoes that have fed on an infected rabbit. Other possible

transmission risks include on your clothes or by using shared bowls or brushes. The clinical signs include puffy fluid filled swellings on the face and head, swollen eyes and swellings around the genitals. It is a very unpleasant disease causing inappetence and blindness and usually death.

Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD) is another deadly infectious disease that pet rabbits are at risk from. VHD has two strains: VHD-1 and a newer VHD-2. Both strains of RVHD are spread by direct contact with infected rabbits or via their urine or faeces. Both strains can cause sudden death.

We recommend annual vaccination against Myxomatosis and VHD to ensure full protection. If you would like any further information or an appointment, please just give us a call!



Caring for your senior 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!

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 a watchful eye on:

Weight loss: Cat's can be masters of disguise and commonly, a range of different health problems can present with only one sign – weight loss. 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. Weight loss can be a feature of many diseases including **diabetes mellitus**, **kidney disease** and **hyperthyroidism** (an over-active thyroid gland).

Drinking more: **diabetes mellitus** and **kidney disease** are common in older cats and both will cause them to drink more than usual. In fact, cats naturally drink very little, so often a cat who drinks 'well', is actually drinking to excess and should have a check-up.

Eating less: **Dental problems** and **kidney disease** are two of the most likely causes of a reduced or changed appetite in a cat. If their mouth is painful, they won't stop eating, but they may start to prefer wet food or, if watched carefully, not actually chew properly. It can be difficult to fully check their mouths at home, so if you are worried, just bring them down! Kidney disease is also a very common cause of appetite loss in older cats.

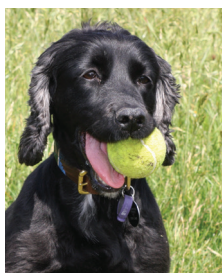
Eating more: An over-active thyroid gland (**hyperthyroidism**) and **diabetes mellitus** will both make cats eat more and while this is often taken as a sign of good health, it can be the opposite, especially if they are losing weight *despite* their increased appetite. The good news is that thyroid disease can be diagnosed from a simple blood test and there are a range of treatment options to manage this condition.

Sore Joints: Arthritis is another condition we see, but seemingly is less well recognised in cats versus dogs, since cats don't always limp or vocalise pain. The most common signs are reduced mobility, reduced activity, altered grooming and maybe the cat becoming more grumpy or avoiding people. Although you might perceive this as ageing changes, it might indicate your cat is actually in pain.

Cognitive dysfunction: Older cats can also suffer with cognitive dysfunction, a form of senile dementia, and exhibit behaviours such as confusion, withdrawing from the family, meowing aimlessly or wandering around the house.

Our feline OAPs will benefit from regular check-ups to monitor for early signs of the many of the conditions mentioned in this article. We can also keep a close eye on their body weight and notice any small changes that might indicate a problem developing. There are often very effective treatments for the management of age-related conditions, so if you have any concerns about your senior cat, please discuss them with us and don't just put changes down to old age itself.

Dietary dilemmas: choosing a diet!



With so many dog and cat foods available, choosing the right diet can feel overwhelming. The most important factor is ensuring your pet's food is balanced and fed in the correct quantities.

Many pet foods are designed for different **life stages**, such as puppy or kitten, junior, adult and senior, to provide the right balance of calories and nutrients as your pet ages. Some diets are also tailored to **breed size**, including large and giant breed dogs. Maintaining a healthy weight is essential to reduce the risk of illness later in life, and neutered or **lower-calorie diets** can help pets stay in good condition.

If your pet has a medical condition, a specific **veterinary prescription diet** may also be beneficial. Kidney diets help reduce waste products the body needs to eliminate, while intestinal diets support pets with short- or long-term digestive problems. There are also specialised diets available for a range of conditions including: heart disease, liver disease and diabetes mellitus. If you need any advice on choosing the right diet for your pet, please don't hesitate to ask!



Spring parasites!

As we approach the warmer Spring weather it's a good idea to keep up your guard against pesky parasites. Here we look at two of the main offenders – fleas and ticks:

Fleas thrive very well, both in your home and outside in parks and gardens. Here, any flea eggs laying dormant will rapidly hatch into adult fleas, hopping onto passing pets.

The best way to prevent fleas is year-round treatment for all your pets with **veterinary licensed** flea products. Tablet and spot-on treatments are ideal for treating your pets, whilst household sprays are great for treating your home.

Ticks are most active through March to October; they live in long grass and woodland and attach themselves to passing pets and also humans. Unlike fleas, ticks are not itchy, but can spread a range of serious tick-borne diseases:

Lyme disease is carried by a small percentage of *Ixodes* ticks in the UK. Affected pets (and also humans) can develop swollen joints and stiffness. They can also develop a fever, anorexia and lethargy.

Babesiosis is a tick-borne disease that can affect dogs travelling to mainland Europe. It is caused by a blood borne parasite (*B. canis*) which destroys red cells, leading to anaemia and also dark red urine.

Ehrlichiosis is another common tick-borne disease in mainland Europe and can cause fatal anaemia.

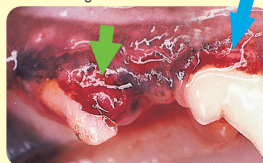
We recommend checking your pets every day (especially after walks) to remove any ticks before they can attach. Ticks that have attached can be removed with a special tick removal tool. For added protection, we recommend using **veterinary licensed** products that work either by repelling the tick from attaching or killing them when they bite.

We are happy to help and advise you on the best form of flea and tick prevention for your pets!



Dental disease in cats

Gum disease is a common cause of tooth loss in cats. In addition to this, cats may also suffer from one or more **tooth resorptive lesions**. Here the enamel is lost, exposing the very sensitive underlying dentine of the tooth. There is often an area of bright red gum overlying the affected area which usually hide a painful cavity in the underlying tooth, although cats will frequently show no obvious outward signs of toothache.



Tooth resorptive lesion in a cat: Typical lesion (green arrow). The tooth is progressively destroyed and is usually very painful. There is also generalised gum disease (blue arrow).

