

## Rabbiting on!



Rabbits can be a wonderful addition to the family.

However, despite their small size they do need well thought out housing, diets and companionship.

**Keep it social!** Rabbits do best in bonded neutered pairs and should have enough room to be able to hop, run and forage. They also like an area for sleeping and a separate toilet area – a small hutch isn't enough. Additionally, house rabbits can be trained to use a litter tray.

**Diets:** Their diet needs to be mainly hay, dark green leafy vegetables and a small amount of a balanced high fibre commercial pelleted food. In summer, rabbits will enjoy grazing untreated lawns especially at dusk and dawn. Rabbits will preferentially eat sweeter foods if given the chance, so muesli type foods are best avoided.



**Teeth:** Due to their continually growing teeth, a high fibre diet is essential to help grind the teeth down and to avoid dental issues.

**Fly Strike:** A good diet should also ensure that they avoid diarrhoea which can lead to flies laying eggs in their fur. The eggs hatch into maggots and start to damage the rabbit's skin – this is known as fly strike and can kill rabbits rapidly. We strongly recommend all rabbits are checked twice a day for any signs of maggots.

**Vaccination:** Like dogs and cats, rabbits should also be vaccinated. The two main diseases are **Myxomatosis** and **Viral Haemorrhagic Disease**. Both of these can be rapidly fatal. There are vaccines available that give good protection that are usually recommended for yearly use. Since Myxomatosis is spread by flies and mosquitoes it is highly recommended to have indoor rabbits vaccinated as well.

## Spring parasites: is your pet affected?



As the weather warms up and the Winter recedes, Spring is here in full bloom. As we enjoy the warmer weather, it's a good idea to keep an eye on the pesky parasites that are also enjoying the milder climate. Here we take a look at fleas and ticks.

**Fleas** love the warm weather, and in addition to your home, they thrive outside in parks and gardens. Here, any dormant flea eggs from last year will rapidly hatch out into adult fleas. Adult fleas will hop onto passing pets, bringing dozens of these tiny pests back into your home. Flea bites can be itchy for both animals and humans, often causing skin rashes and hair loss. Worse still, they hop off our pets and make their home in pet beds, carpets and soft furnishings, where the flea life-cycle is perpetuated.

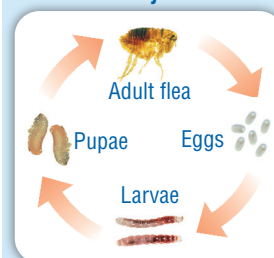
The best way to prevent fleas is year-round treatment for all your pets with veterinary licensed flea products. These are extremely effective at killing fleas and they kill them *before* they lay their eggs, with the aim of preventing home infestations.

Another parasite to keep an eye out for are ticks, which are most active through March to October. They typically live in woodlands and long grasses, waiting to attach themselves to passing pets, and feeding off their blood for several days. Unlike fleas, ticks are not itchy, but can spread a range of tick-borne diseases. These are discussed in further detail below this article.

We recommend checking your pets every day (especially after walks) to remove any ticks *before* they can attach. If they have attached themselves, then removing ticks with a special tick removal tool which won't crush or stress the tick is the best course of action; if the tick gets stressed it can increase the risk of disease transmission. The good news is that current evidence suggests that tick-borne diseases take many hours after tick attachment to be transmitted. Using a product that rapidly kills or repels ticks will help to reduce the risk of these diseases.

If you would like further information on flea and tick prevention, or parasite prevention more generally, please ask a member of our practice team – we are happy to help!

### The flea life-cycle



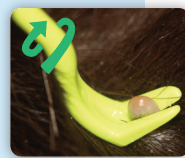
### Checking for fleas



Whilst it is often difficult to find live fleas, specks of flea "dirt" (faeces) in the coat points to a flea problem.

### Removing ticks

Attached ticks with buried mouthparts are often found whilst grooming your pets. Ticks are best removed with a specially designed tick hook with a twisting action.



## Tick-borne diseases – what are they?



As mentioned above, ticks can spread a range of deadly diseases which pose serious health risks to both pets *and* humans. The major ones are:

**Lyme disease**, also called borreliosis, is spread by ticks; affected pets (and humans) can develop a range of symptoms including swollen joints, stiffness, fever, anorexia, lethargy and kidney problems.

**Babesiosis** is an emerging tick-borne disease, destroying red blood cells and causing acute signs of anaemia in affected dogs (but not humans).

**Erlchiosis** also attacks red blood cells and can be fatal. Both Babesiosis and Erlchiosis are particularly prevalent abroad, so if you take your dog abroad on holiday (Covid permitting!), it is *essential* to protect them against ticks.

We are here to help – our team are always happy to advise you on the best products to kill or repel ticks and also reduce the risk of tick-borne diseases. Please don't hesitate to get in touch!

## Brushing up on dental care!



Did you know that dental disease is a very common but under-diagnosed problem in pets? So what should we be looking for and what are the tell tale signs of problems? This article will look at the underlying causes of dental disease, plus how best to treat and prevent dental disease in our pets.

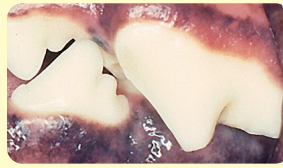
A healthy mouth typically has bright white teeth and pink (or pigmented) gums. In our pets, most dental disease is linked to inflammation of the gums caused by plaque bacteria, a condition called **gingivitis** (also called gum disease). At this stage you might notice swollen, inflamed, reddened gums, bad breath and some accumulation of calculus on the tooth surface.

If the condition is allowed to continue unchecked, bacteria will start to penetrate below the gum line, destroying the tooth supporting structures, resulting in gum and bone loss, dental pain, very bad breath, tooth loosening, abscess formation and sometimes tooth loss. This condition is termed **periodontitis**.

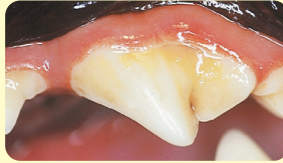
Cats can suffer from gum disease as described above, but in addition may also suffer from one or more **tooth resorptive lesions**. In this condition there is enamel loss from the tooth's surface, exposing the very sensitive underlying dentine of the tooth. There is also often an area of bright red gingiva overlying

the affected area which usually hides a painful cavity in the underlying tooth, although cats will frequently show no obvious outward signs of tooth ache. Sadly, affected teeth usually need to be extracted.

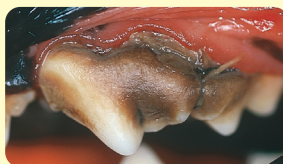
**So what can be done?** Regular dental check-ups (as part of the booster visit) are a key part of monitoring for dental disease. The good news is that if dental problems are identified at an *early* stage, a combination of a scale and polish and on-going home care can make a big difference to your pet's oral health. With a clean mouth, daily teeth cleaning is a great way to try to prevent future dental disease. However not all pets are amenable to this and there are many alternative products available, which we would be happy to discuss with you.



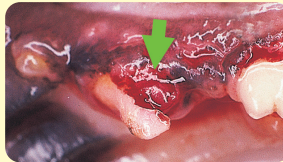
Healthy Mouth in a dog



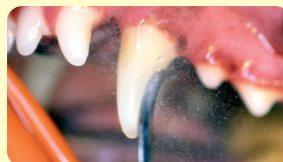
Gingivitis in a dog with swollen and inflamed gums



Periodontitis in a dog with very inflamed and receding gums.



**Tooth resorptive lesion in a cat:** Typical lesion (arrowed). The tooth is progressively destroyed and is usually very painful.



**Scale and Polish:** Removing the tartar using an ultrasonic scaler, followed by polishing is a very effective form of treatment and should ideally be followed by effective home care.



## Spring into action!

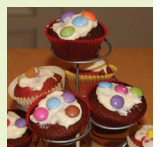
Spring is here at last with longer days, longer walks and warmer weather! With this in mind, here are a few seasonal tips to keep your pet safe:

**Stick to balls!** We want people to enjoy their walks but would advise picking the items they throw for their dogs with care. Sticks get a bad press and for very good reason. Sticks have a great ability to cause painful penetrating injuries, plus they are breakable, leaving foreign material behind as well as causing truly awful wounds. A safer option is using a ball instead – being mindful of getting the right size ball for your dog. It needs to be large enough that your dog isn't at risk of it getting stuck in his throat.



This is a typical stick injury where the stick has become lodged in the dog's throat.

**Easter toxin alert!** Easter will soon be upon us and although the sweet treats available for humans are lovely, they can be hazardous for our pets. Dogs are very susceptible to **chocolate** toxicity. The stronger the chocolate, the more dangerous it can be, and as little as 50g of plain chocolate can prove fatal in small dogs. **Sultanas and raisins** – found in hot cross buns, fruit cakes and the like, are also toxic for your dog. Also beware of any cakes baked with the artificial sweetener **xylitol** which is very toxic to dogs.



Whilst on the subject of toxins, be very careful of **permethrins**. 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 please contact us at once if you notice any signs of unusual behaviour or illness.



## Lump alert: is your pet affected?



One of the benefits of regularly grooming your pets is that you can not only keep any eye out for lumps and bumps, but also a variety of parasites (including ticks and fleas). Plus – during the summer months, you may also find the grass awns of the meadow grasses which can cause problems if they become embedded.

If you do find what looks like a skin lump, it's important to get in touch so we can assess it. Lumps and bumps can come in a variety of shapes and sizes and there are numerous underlying causes including: allergic reactions (such as insect bites), abscesses, hernias (common in younger pets), and tumours.

Tumours are understandably the most worrying and are either *benign* – which tend to be slow growing and remain in one place, or *malignant* – which can be fast growing, invade the surrounding tissue and have the potential to spread to other parts of the body.

As with many things – speed is of the essence when dealing with lumps. Most lumps are much better dealt with when small rather than waiting until they are larger and much harder to treat. So – if you do discover a lump or bump on your pet, we are here to help – just give us a call!



Ticks are widespread across the UK and Ireland and may be mistaken as small lumps.



Skin lump on a dog



Skin lump on a cat