

## EMMA WINS NATIONAL PET MONTH COMPETITION...

After making many visits to local schools and nurseries and encouraging children to handle deadly reptiles Emma was awarded national recognition by the board of trustees at the National Pet Month charity. They said of Emma 'the excellent educational visits that you made to the schools and nurseries were inspirational. A fantastic example of working with others and it was felt the aims of National Pet Month, including promoting responsible pet ownership and encouraging happy healthy pets were taken into account and furthered as part of the event organised.' Well done Emma!

## Preventable infectious diseases...

### Parvovirus

There have been recent cases of Parvovirus confirmed in both Crediton and Collumpton. Normal annual vaccinations do prevent this disease if kept up to date. Puppies are particularly susceptible and should be kept out of public areas until 1 week after their second inoculation.

### Kennel Cough

We see this most commonly in gun dogs and agility dogs - it is preventable by vaccination. Dogs who do contract kennel cough will need a course of antibiotics and at least 3 weeks rest before returning to work.

### Fleas

What a year for the common flea! Many are surviving in the environment and as a result a large number of pets are carrying fleas in spite of regular flea treatment. Flea control relies upon environment control as well as treatment of individual animal populations. At the best flea infestations are annoying, at the worst they can be fatal - we have had 2 confirmed deaths of kittens from anaemia caused by high flea burdens. Speak to a vet or nurse for the best advice for your individual situation.

St Boniface Veterinary Clinic  
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St Boniface Veterinary Clinic

by Tim Hutchinson,  
Larkmead Veterinary Group



A normal hip joint



A hip with severe arthritis



# Arthritis in Dogs

Arthritis is one of the most common disease conditions seen in dogs and is frequently becoming recognised in cats too.

Whereas in people the most common forms of arthritis are related either to old age (wear and tear of a normal joint over time) or primary inflammation (such as rheumatoid arthritis), in dogs arthritis is most commonly the result of abnormal wear and tear of a joint due to an underlying conformational problem.

For instance, in a dog with hip dysplasia the normal shape of the ball and socket joint fails to develop so that the edge of the socket wears against the surface of the ball. This results in damage to the cartilage and sets up a vicious cycle of degeneration that will continue throughout the dog's life.

Arthritis cannot be cured and arthritic changes cannot be reversed, but steps can be taken to slow the progression of joint disease and to alleviate the symptoms associated with the condition. The three most important aspects of treating arthritis are:

**1. Pain relief** - by the use of anti-inflammatory drugs. Initially this may be intermittent to combat pain from flare-up episodes, but may need to become long-term treatment as the condition worsens. Fortunately the modern range of such drugs are extremely safe and efficacious for our patients.

**2. Weight loss** - recent studies have confirmed that the majority of dogs in the UK are overweight! Force-plate studies at Universities have shown that the peak force transmitted

through a joint for a dog trotting beside its owner is up to five times its bodyweight. A small weightloss can therefore make a big difference to the degree of force - and ongoing damage - put through a joint.

**3. Exercise modification** - exercise is beneficial for diseased joints, because it improves blood-flow, strengthens supporting muscles and maintains the pliability of the thickened, stiffened tissues that surround a joint. However the type of exercise is important: controlled regular exercise is almost always beneficial, but high impact exercise such as ball-chasing can be very damaging. An appropriate exercise regime needs to be tailored to each individual patient and may need to change in response to flare-up episodes of joint pain and inflammation.

There is wide interest in various supplements and alternative treatment modalities. Results from these are often conflicting at best, so the above 'Holy Trinity' of arthritis management should always be in place before other methods are considered. Basic massage and physiotherapy techniques are easily learned and can be very useful in certain cases.

Regular checks with a vet who knows your pet and its joints well form the cornerstone of treatment and will allow the vet to advise appropriately on subtle changes in your pet's condition.

# Small talk

St Boniface Veterinary Clinic

SMALL ANIMAL NEWSLETTER

All the Latest News from your XLVets Practice...

Arthritis in dogs...



# How long can 9 lives last...

XLVets  
Excellence in Practice



Because of better diet and better healthcare, a cat's nine lives are lasting even longer



**I**n this Autumn edition of Small Talk, we will be considering some of the conditions that our pets may suffer from as they become older. Ageing itself is obviously an inevitable consequence of advancing years, but it is important that we do not overlook treatable conditions that may adversely affect the quality of life of our aging pets. Your dog has become much slower on his walks and you are now having to wait for him - could it be that he has developed heart disease, or joint problems such as arthritis? Management of such conditions may make walks more enjoyable again for both you and your dog. Your elderly cat is losing weight - this could be an early warning of kidney disease or an overactive thyroid.

Don't assume that you can't help your pet - managing many of these conditions will allow them to grow old gracefully and in comfort.

## How long can 9 lives last?

by Gareth Harries, Wright & Morten

**C**ats have long been recognised as having an amazing capacity to recover from some of the insults that life throws its way and in these days of better diet and better healthcare, a cat's nine lives are lasting even longer. With advancing years, cats do tend to develop a number of problems and with some conditions in particular, the earlier the problem is identified, the more that can be done to influence the progression of the disease. Kidney failure is the most worrying of these conditions. We very rarely know exactly what causes the damage, but this damage results in a failure to filter the blood adequately so products accumulate that effectively poison the body. The initial signs are an increased thirst which can be obvious as most cats actually need relatively little to drink. Cats should produce very concentrated urine and a urine sample can quickly reveal a problem but it is not always that simple to collect! Combining this with results of blood tests helps us identify kidney problems and then we can use specially designed foods to limit the production of the main substance that causes problems 'Urea', along with a number of other products which we introduce when required to help with the knock on effects of anaemia, loss of appetite, protein and vitamin and mineral losses. This is not a condition we can cure. Humans have regular hospital visits for filtration of their blood, but in cats such technology is not available, and nor is the ultimate treatment of a kidney transplant. Nevertheless, we can very often keep these cats happy for many years.

High blood pressure may develop in some cats with or without kidney problems, just like in many humans. The old adage of prevention being better than cure is especially appropriate with a problem that can suddenly leave your cat blind without any apparent warning. You may wonder how on earth we measure a cat's blood pressure! It is not so different to that experienced by many of us owners.

One common condition seen is Hyperthyroidism. These cats are sometimes described as Morris Minors which turn into Porsches!! Thyroid hormone controls the speed of the metabolism so increases

in the circulating level results in many changes in many organs. Cats lose weight despite eating everything in sight, their behaviour changes and we find that their heart rate rises because of changes to the heart muscle. Once we have confirmed this using blood testing, control involves daily medication, surgery, or radioactive iodine treatment, just like their owners would receive. However, cats must be hospitalised and treated as actually being radioactive for a few weeks so they have to stay in specially designed isolation accommodation.

Arthritis and old age are certainly words that you would put together and despite not showing the sort of changes that we may be familiar with in dogs, or even in humans, it is actually far more common than most people would expect. A recent survey of cats over 7 years old found a staggering 75% of them to be affected. Because we don't drag them out for walks, or throw a ball for them, we often don't notice.

Generally we mainly spot that cats will change their behaviour and the changes have been referred to as the 'Four faces of feline Pain'. They become less active and avoid using their cat flap, sleep more, groom less and can often begin to look quite scruffy. Recently introduced cat specific pain killers can take years off the way their legs feel and whilst they won't revert to being kitten, they'll certainly avoid the need for a stair lift!

**Remember** Not all cats will reach their pension age, but we do all hope to give them a thoroughly enjoyable life for as long as we all possibly can.



### DID YOU KNOW...

The heart consists of 4 chambers and 2 main vessels

The heart functions as a pump in the circulatory system, it helps to circulate blood firstly to the lungs to receive oxygen. It then receives the blood back and pumps it around the rest of the body to provide the organs with nutrients and energy.

by Gary Jennings, Hook Norton Veterinary Group

# Heart disease...

The heart consists of 4 chambers and 2 main pipes (vessels), there are also valves to direct the blood flow. Later in life heart disease can affect dogs and cats due to a variety of reasons:

#### Types of heart disease

- **Valve disease** - often in older pets valves can become diseased
- **Heart muscle disease** - often later in life the muscle can start to fail (cardiomyopathy)
- **Rhythm changes**

#### How do I know if my animal may have heart disease?

There are various signs to look out for, although these signs can also be due to other causes. It is always best to contact your vet practice as soon as you detect any problems.

Lethargy, slowing down on walks, coughing, swollen abdomen - often due to fluid accumulating, pale gums, collapse, lack of appetite, breathing difficulties.

#### What your vet can do

Your vet will work with you and discuss the history including the signs you have noticed, a full clinical examination of the entire body is very important, using a stethoscope to check

the heart. The vet will be able to check the heart rate and rhythm, the pulse, and the chest. There may be a murmur present (this is a change in the heart sounds which can suggest heart disease).

#### Heart tests

Various tests are available including blood tests, ultrasound scans, x rays, blood pressure, electrocardiogram (ecg). The ecg is a piece of equipment which checks the heart's rhythm (it produces a graph on the screen or paper similar to heart machines used in human hospitals).

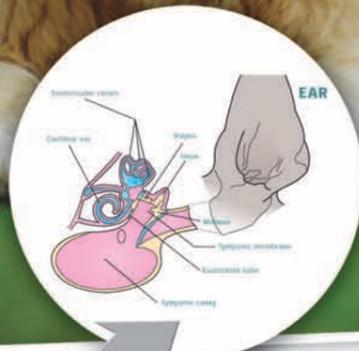
From the tests the vet and owner can establish what the cause of the heart problem is and also use this information to decide on the best treatment plans.

#### Treatment

It is very important that the vet and owner work together to check that the daily routine is correct in a dog with heart disease. The weight of the dog, type of diet and type of exercise are all important.

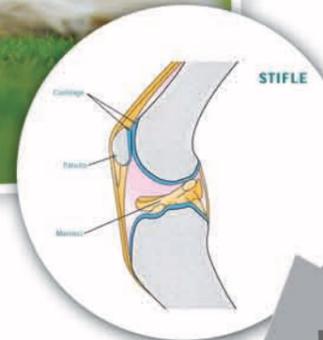
Medicine is mainly in the form of tablets, they are designed to work on the cardiac muscle, or the vessels, diuretics are also used to remove fluid which may accumulate in the abdomen or chest.

**In some rare cases surgery is needed.**



#### Eyes and Ears

- Infection and wax
- Ageing changes



#### STIFLE

#### Skeletal and Muscles

- Lameness/Stiffness
- Muscle wastage

#### Behaviour

- House Soiling
- Senility

#### Mouth

- Bad breath
- Dental Disease

#### Skin

- Dandruff/Itching
- Coat changes
- Lumps/Bumps

#### Chest and Heart

- Coughing
- Heart Disease/Exercise Tolerance
- Blood Pressure

#### Abdomen

- Pain/Discomfort
- Abdominal lumps
- Kidney Disease/Increased thirst
- Digestive Disorders

## IS YOUR DOG OR CAT READY FOR ITS MOT?

by Lindsay Grant, Northvet Veterinary Group

**O**ften the first sign of ageing in our pets is a general decrease in activity levels, a tendency to sleep longer and a loss of interest in the goings on in the home. Senior pets are more susceptible to health problems and behavioral changes.

**Digestion** can get impaired in old age.

The diet should be light but nutritious. Good quality senior foods are recommended which contain the correct nutritional contents to meet the needs of the older pet.

**Dental disease** affects around 85% of dogs and cats over the age of 3 years. This disease is a very underestimated and common disease that can severely affect our pets health and wellbeing. Not only does it affect the mouth, the huge quantities of bacteria found in plaque and tartar can enter the blood stream

causing problems in the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and even the brain.

**Arthritis** is another common problem in senior pets. They can start to feel stiff and suffer pain in their joints. There are many products available which can help. Don't accept painful joints as part of ageing - let us help you give your pet the quality of life they deserve.

**Heart and circulatory disease** Signs of heart disease may include coughing, lethargy and reluctance to exercise. Good management and medicines can slow the progression of cardiac disease and give your pet a longer, more comfortable life.

**Thyroid disease** is common in older cats. Weight loss but with an enthusiastic appetite, hyperactivity and a fast heart rate are all symptoms. A simple blood test can diagnose this condition.

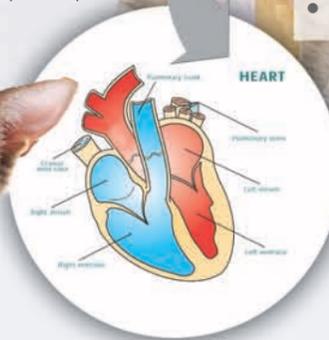
**Kidneys** are vital for life and kidney failure is seen in as many as 18% of the UK cat population. Kidney disease is a slow process and early

detection will enable you pet to receive diet or treatment to slow the progression of the disease. Signs include weight loss, lethargy, increased drinking and urination, vomiting and bad breath.

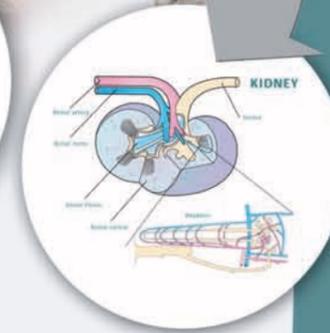
**Diabetes** can give similar symptoms to kidney problems. A urine test can detect the first signs of diabetes and a blood test can confirm the disease. Diabetes cannot be cured but simple routine and good management and in some cases medication, will allow your pet to continue his senior years with very little change.

**Growths** can appear on your pet as they get older. Most of these lumps are nothing to worry about but your vet should be made aware of any growths you find on your pet.

**Sadly we cannot stop our pets from getting older but pet owners can delay the signs of ageing with good management and regular health checks. Make an appointment for your senior pet health check up and help your pal grow old gracefully.**



#### HEART



#### KIDNEY