



PET CENTRE - Topical issues for pets

In this centre section of our newsletter we will bring you lots of seasonal information about the health issues that commonly affect our pets. As we head into winter, arthritis control is always on pet owners' minds, and our staff are here to give advice and help you choose the best treatment products for your family pets.

These centre pages are also where we can inform you about the latest developments in veterinary medicine, and other topical issues that involve your pets.



What does your cat eat and drink?

The latest information available on the treatment of some common feline ailments seems to have a common theme - get your cat used to a variety of foods, and get them to drink more!

Cats are known to enjoy both hard and soft foods, but individual cats seem to have their own preferences for food textures and tastes. This is thought to be partly a learnt preference that develops in the first year then stays with a cat for life.

Preventing your cat from being fussy means that if they develop a medical condition that would benefit from a specific diet they will be open to this diet change.

An important example is kidney disease, a commonly diagnosed illness in older cats. Research shows that eating a kidney-sparing prescription diet is the most important treatment in slowing the progress of the disease. And eating a canned form of this food, which contains 75% water compared with 6-10% moisture in dry food is an easy way to maintain the good water intake important in kidney disease.

Lower urinary tract disease and diabetes are other examples of diseases in which diet is important for control.

Many cats may be on a premium wet (sachet or canned) or dry food and doing well. Nutrition is not a one-size fits all, and the 'best' food type may differ between individuals. However, having your cat accept a variety of good quality foods is important if they do develop an illness in which diet plays a part in treatment - it is always easier to make these food changes while your cat is well.

- Introduce a variety of food flavours and most importantly textures to kittens and young cats, so that they do not develop strong food preferences.
- If your cat only likes one type of food, add a wet or different flavoured food to their preferred diet a little at a time. Over a few weeks you can usually get them eating a new food. Some cats really don't like change - if your cat initially rejects a food, try offering it again a week later.
- Remember to make food changes gradually, to reduce the chance of tummy upsets. Ask our staff for more nutritional advice for your pet family.

Cat drinking fountains

The cat drinking fountain was designed by a veterinarian, in response to the need to get cats with kidney disease or urinary tract disease to drink more. The design is based around the fact that cats enjoy moving water - this stimulates their curiosity, so entices them to drink more. Some of the designs also incorporate a carbon filter, which absorbs odours and tastes. The water movement results in aeration, and the combination of water aeration and filtration may also be a more pleasant taste for the cat.

The bowl is plugged in to an electrical source, and a quiet pump recirculates water from the bowl, releasing it as a fountain over the bowl.

The downside in some pet families is that everyone wanted to use the cat fountain! They are now available in a range of sizes, big enough for several cats and even the dog!



Trixie's tale

'Hi I am Trixie and I live in Wellington, but last month I went on a plane (all by myself!) to Auckland to stay with some nice friends of my mothers for a week. One day I was left home with the teenagers, and they forgot the lecture from their mother and left the door open - and as I was feeling a bit bored, I went for a wee trot down the drive, down the street, around the corner... well I was having a good explore, when a nice man came along and put me in his van (which smelt a bit doggy, I must say). He was from a place called the pound, and he looked on my collar for my dog tag. I tried to tell him that Max had chewed it off (Max is my brother - he is a Cavalier too. It's actually not his fault about the tag - I asked him to chew it off. Well, it was green - sooo 2006) - so he didn't know that I was registered. However, the good news is that I had on my best shiny collar and a tag from the Kelburn Vet Centre where I go to have my teeth cleaned. The nice pound man thought I looked too small and well cared for to go to the pound, so he took me to the council offices. The council rang mum in Wellington - but she wasn't home! So THEN they rang the Kelburn Vet Centre number (that's on my tag too!), and they rang my mum ('cause they have ALL her contact numbers) and she rang her friend and I was soon safely home!

Anyway, the moral of the story is: if you look cute, wag your tail lots, and wear your best collar with your vet clinic tag - even if you are a bit naughty and go wandering, you might not end up in a loud smelly pound! (And perhaps you shouldn't let your brother chew off your council tag either!)



DENTAL CARE



This cat has tartar on the back molars

Keeping teeth in good health prevents bad breath, preserves teeth into old age, and protects your pet's organs from the bacteria associated with gum and tooth decay. Over the course of a lifetime, good dental health will add significantly to your pet's quality of life and perhaps even extend their lifetime.

More than 85% of dogs and cats older than four years have periodontal disease. Periodontal disease starts with the formation of plaque on the teeth, which left untreated progresses to hard tartar which promotes bacterial growth. By-products of these bacteria 'eat away' the tooth's support structures causing inflamed and painful gums, and tooth damage or loss.

Start your pet's dental health regimen with a trip to see us at the clinic, and we can make recommendations based on what is found. For some pets, this may include a complete cleaning and polishing under anesthesia, and possibly some periodontal work and the removal of broken or rotting teeth.

After any problems are treated, at-home care can keep things in good shape.

● Dry food helps prevent plaque buildup, and some pets will also be recommended prescription diets specifically designed for dental care.

● Brush or wipe the teeth regularly. Use a toothpaste designed for dogs and cats, and a toothbrush, brush that fits over your fingertip, or plain gauze wrapped around your finger - we can show you the best technique.

● Cats and small breeds of dogs may be particularly prone to plaque and tartar build up. Dogs that are predisposed to dental disease may be candidates for a new dental vaccine against the main bacteria responsible for periodontal disease.

Ask at our clinic for recommendations to best care for the teeth and general well-being of your pets.



After a dental scale and polish the gums are slightly inflamed, which will settle quickly. This cat will now go onto a preventative dental care programme.

ARTHRITIS - are we doing the best for your pet?

It's winter, and all of our arthritic pets deserve careful attention. If they are more sore or stiff than they were in the warm weather this is not from 'old age', but because of pain. Osteoarthritis, or degenerative joint disease, is the number one cause of chronic pain in the dog and cat.

Osteoarthritis is a chronic progressive disease, where the cartilage covering the joint surfaces is damaged. Many of the normal chemicals in the joints are also destroyed and inflammation is present. Treatments aim at slowing these processes and so reducing pain.

Glucosamine and Chondroitin are cartilage components harvested from sea mollusks, and sometimes from animal cartilage. You may be familiar with them as products marketed for human joint health, and they are available in similar products for pets. They are both often termed 'chondroprotectant' (cartilage protecting), and work best in combination with one another to maintain and rebuild cartilage as well as increasing the production of joint fluid and reducing inflammation.

Green lipped mussel is a New Zealand shellfish available as a supplement providing chondroitin and other chondroprotectants. Studies on the effectiveness of this product have been mixed, so ensure you are buying a reputable and researched product.

Injectable polysulfated glycosaminoglycan and pentosan polysulphate (phew!) are the active ingredients in several injectable products for veterinary use. These have similar effects to chondroitin and glucosamine, but work more quickly. Research results favour these injectable products over oral supplements in positive benefits for the arthritic pet.

Omega 3 Fatty Acids have been found to have anti-inflammatory properties, but require at least one month to build up therapeutic levels. Studies on Hill's Science Diet prescription food for arthritic dogs, j/d, containing omega 3 fatty acids and other joint protecting and repairing nutraceuticals are very positive.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs)

As arthritis is progressive, pets often also need NSAIDs to keep them comfortable. New age forms of these drugs are safe to use, and reduce inflammation and pain in the joints, greatly increasing the quality of life for many arthritic pets.

Starting on joint foods early in the progression of arthritis may be more beneficial in helping cartilage repair. Later in the progression of arthritis, pets may need to also be on anti-inflammatory drugs for adequate pain relief. Many other factors are important in arthritis control, such as warmth and weight control.



Is your arthritic pet on the best treatment? Check with one of our vets today.