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COMPANION ANIMAL NEWSLETTER – OCTOBER 2023

TRICK OR TREAT?

We can no longer ignore it, autumn has arrived bringing with it the annual festivities associated with Halloween and Bonfire Night! These events can be highly stressful for many of our pets and now is the time to consider what we can do and what changes we can make to support them.

Halloween: Whilst this is a fun time for the whole family, some pets might find it rather stressful, with lots of people coming and going wearing weird and wonderful (not to mention scary!) costumes and masks, this can be both unsettling and frightening. We also need to consider that some foods are toxic to dogs and cats – particularly chocolate and raisins, so ensuring these are not available for our pets to gain access to is essential party planning.

Fireworks: Another fun night (or even weekend) for the majority of us, but not so fun for our pets and wildlife. The unusual noises, colours and smells can be very stressful and scary.

There are many ways we can help to alleviate stress for our pets at this time:

- **Desensitisation:** Unfortunately, this needs to be done months before firework events to be most effective. There are lots of resources available, the Dogs Trust have audio playlists that can be used throughout the year to help acclimatise your pets to loud noises associated with fireworks. These are played at a very low level, building up over time so that your pet doesn't respond negatively to the real event.
- **Safe Space:** Creating a den or safe space for your dog or cat to hide in can be very beneficial. An area that they perceive to be theirs, with familiar objects and smells can reassure them a lot. This can even be combined with calming plug-ins and sprays to make it even more relaxing. Utilising a private area in the house with minimum disturbances can work, covering it with blankets etc and putting toys and treats in to make it a more appealing place for them.
- **Thundershirts:** These work by applying a constant pressure across your pet's body, releasing hormones that reduce the heart rate and calm the wearer (similar to oxytocin and endorphins). Studies show that this can have a significant benefit in up to 80% of dogs. It's like having a constant, reassuring hug!
- **Calming Diffusers and Sprays:** There are many different sprays and diffusers on the market. We stock Pet Remedy (multi-pet), Adaptil (dogs) and Feliway (cats). Diffusers will cover a specific radius, so these are good to use if you are going to make a safe space. Sprays can be applied anywhere and are good for use in cars when travelling. The hormonal products (Adaptil/Feliway) are designed to mimic the hormones in the body that help to relieve stress. The herbal products (Pet Remedy) use natural herbs and plant extracts (such as skullcap and valerian) to achieve the calming effect.
- **Calming Supplements:** Most nutraceutical (or supplement) suppliers will have their own version of a calming supplement. Again, these use herbal ingredients such as skullcap and valerian and may also have other components such as L-tryptophan in them which can assist in calming and reducing anxiety. We stock both Nutracalm and Calmex ranges in the surgery.
- **Medications:** If your pet does not respond to any of the options above, there are other prescription medicines which can be prescribed following a veterinary consultation.



PANCREATITIS- WHAT IS IT?

We have seen several dogs recently at the practice suffering from pancreatitis. This can be very painful and may result in some patients being hospitalised for intravenous fluids and further medication. It can help to have a better understanding of pancreatitis, and ways in which we can prevent this happening to your dog (without forgetting that it can occur in cats as well!).

The pancreas is an elongated glandular organ located in the front of the abdomen that has endocrine and exocrine functions:

Endocrine – an organ or group of cells that secrete regulatory substances directly into the circulation

Exocrine – secreting substances externally via a duct

The endocrine part of the pancreas is responsible for producing insulin and glucagon, but it is the exocrine function that plays a large part in pancreatitis. This produces bicarbonate that neutralizes acids from the stomach, and enzymes that are required for digestion.

Digestion enzymes -

Trypsin – breaks down protein

Lipase – breaks down fats in the intestinal tract, in pancreatic cases the levels are usually increased

Amylase – breaks down starch

When the pancreas becomes inflamed the digestive enzymes are released into the circulation and cause severe clinical signs that can lead to shock and, in some cases, even death. In most cases the cause is unknown, but can be associated with obesity, high fat diets, low blood pressure, blockage of a pancreatic duct, infection, bile duct obstruction, and scavenging something fatty.

Pancreatitis can be acute or chronic:

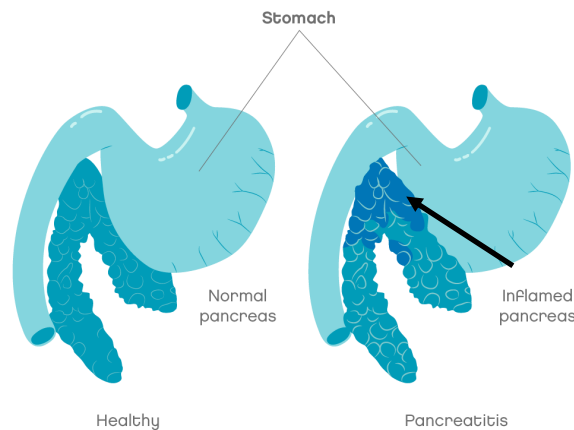
Acute – happens suddenly over 12 – 24 hours

Chronic – low grade but continual inflammation

Acute pancreatitis can be life threatening as complications such as peritonitis can develop (inflammation of the lining of the abdomen).

Signs of pancreatitis can include:

- Vomiting
- High temperature
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhoea
- Reduced appetite or not eating at all
- Weight loss
- Dehydration



In acute cases shock and collapse may occur.

Diagnosis of pancreatitis can be difficult, but methods such as blood tests to look at lipase levels in the blood can be helpful. Radiography can be used to look at the size of the pancreas, although ultrasound is usually a better choice as this can show us the appearance of the pancreas but also if there is any abnormal localised fluid and inflammation around the pancreas and surrounding tissues.

In acute cases, treatment is pain relief, medication to stop the vomiting and nil by mouth until the vomiting stops. Intravenous fluids are essential to address dehydration. Once the patient shows signs of improvement, small frequent low-fat meals should be offered, and the patient's response monitored. With the chronic cases, long-term management is with a low/reduced fat diet. We all love and want to do our best for our pets, but giving those extra little treats here and there, and bits from our plates can contribute to this condition.

Recently Bob the Labrador, who belongs to one of our nurses consumed two raw burgers from the fridge after the door was left open for a second and he saw his opportunity. Unfortunately, this led him to have a mild pancreatitis due to the sudden intake of a high fat content and he required a low-fat diet and pain relief. Poor Bob, those burgers don't look so good now do they?!



Check out our website www.daleheadvetgroup.co.uk for more information about caring for your pet, special offers, vet and staff profiles and much more!

