



Companion Animal Newsletter - November 2020

WHY DO WE TAKE SAMPLES FROM LUMPS?

Welcome to the first in our new series of the 'Why Do We' articles.

As we age we all suffer from lumps and bumps and our pets are no different. Sometimes when you bring your pet to the practice for a vet to examine a lump we may recommend taking a sample. This can generally be done in 3 ways:

1. Fine needle aspirate (FNA- taking a few cells from the middle of the lump via a needle and syringe)
2. Punch biopsy (like taking an apple corer out of the middle of the lump, usually done under general anaesthetic (GA))
3. Excision biopsy (complete lump removal again under GA).

Knowing what cells the lump is made up of can help us determine if it's cancerous or not (malignant or benign) and can help us with our decision making.

For example, we may just monitor the lump on your pet, or if surgery is needed estimate how wide the surgical margins need to be (the area around the lump, including how deep). Some benign lumps can be bothersome to the animal so we might suggest removal, whereas others can be left to be monitored.

We may also recommend to send the lump away to the pathologist for histopathology (this is where the lump is processed and then cut into very fine slices) and allows the pathologist to look at not only what cells the lump has, but the full structure itself.



We have lots of gifts to choose from so why not SPOIL YOUR PET THIS CHRISTMAS?

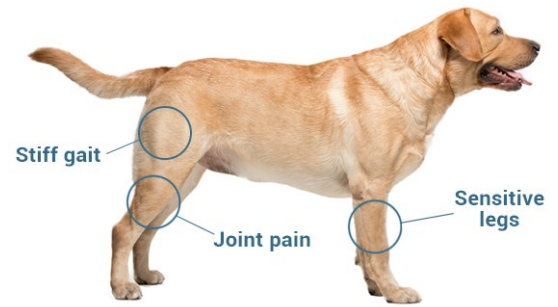


BABY IT'S COLD OUTSIDE

WHAT IS OSTEOARTHRITIS?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a very common problem in small animals. The condition causes long term degeneration of joints and involves many tissues including cartilage (the joint surface), bone under the cartilage, joint capsule, ligaments and tendons. It has been estimated that up to half of all dogs and cats will be affected by osteoarthritis at some point in their lives and it is not just confined to older pets.

Cats are very commonly affected by OA, and this may be seen when they are quite young. In Dogs OA usually has a specific underlying cause such as developmental conditions like hip dysplasia or cruciate ligament rupture, and injuries to the knee joint.



What are the key symptoms of OA?

The key signs of osteoarthritis are:

- *Stiffness
- *Lameness
- *Pain especially after rest or exercise.

DOES MY PET HAVE JOINT PAIN?

If your pet shows any of the symptoms above (you may also notice them moaning or grunting on rising and sitting, having restless sleep, or sometimes even an altered behaviour including aggression when touched) then the answer is probably yes.

HOW DO WE DIAGNOSE OA?

Joints affected with osteoarthritis are often thickened with a restricted range of movement. Muscles on the affected leg are often atrophied (smaller due to lack of use). These are changes that can be felt by your vet and we may recommend x-rays or a trial course of pain relief.



X-rays are the most common method of diagnosing the condition and ruling out other possible causes of joint pain and lameness. As with people, more advanced imaging (MRI, CT and ultrasound scans) are occasionally necessary. Arthroscopy (keyhole surgery) is a technique which enables the vet to inspect inside the affected joints with a camera and may be indicated in select cases, for example to detect torn ligaments. Collection and analysis of joint fluid can be important in some cases to rule out other possible causes of joint pain.

WHAT TREATMENTS ARE AVAILABLE FOR OSTEOARTHRITIS?

Unfortunately there is no cure for OA. Treatment aims to allow pets to use the affected joint or joints without pain. There is no single approach to treatment which is successful in every case, and most dogs and cats need a multi-modal approach, which might include:

- **Pain relief**- osteoarthritis can be painful, and so in some animals long term medication is needed. Although medication can have a risk of side effects, this low risk must be balanced against pain from the osteoarthritis if the medication is not given.
- **Exercise** - whilst exercise can cause discomfort in the short term, exercise is important to keep pets fit and healthy. There is no golden rule as to how much exercise an animal with osteoarthritis can have, as all patients are different, instead, exercise levels need to be tailored to the individual animal.

- **Diet** - diets containing omega-3-fatty acids may have a natural anti-inflammatory action which may help to relieve discomfort associated with OA
- **Therapies** – acupuncture, physiotherapy, and hydrotherapy are important in the treatment of osteoarthritis. They can be used to build muscle, improve joint use, and reduce muscle stiffness. These therapies need to be discussed carefully with your Vet initially though to avoid making painful joints worse.
- **Soft Beds and use of tailored aids** such as ramps for accessing cars can be a real help
- **Mobility scoring** – can help you keep a record of how your pet is responding to their treatment. It can provide a really useful tool for vets to help guide them in their treatment decisions.
- **Salvage Surgeries** – in some animals osteoarthritis can be so severe that medications and physiotherapy are

ineffective. In these cases ‘salvage’ surgery may be considered.

Managing expectations in OA treatment

Osteoarthritis is a waxing and waning disease and so animals can have good days and bad days.



AUTUMN HAZARDS



Autumn walks with our dogs are full of fascinating sights, sounds and scents – but not everything our dogs come across will be good for them if eaten. Most of us are aware of foods that are poisonous to dogs around the home, such as grapes and chocolate, but there are also things our dogs should steer clear of when out and about.

PARK AND GARDEN PLANTS THAT ARE POISONOUS TO DOGS



A handful of cultivated plants are toxic to dogs such as amaryllis (especially the bulbs) and hydrangeas. Many flowering bulbs are toxic to dogs, commonly known ones being daffodils and tulips as well as autumn-flowering crocuses.

Be vigilant that your dog does not dig up bulbs that have been newly planted in autumn for next spring. Azalea and rhododendron bushes can cause nausea, vomiting, breathing difficulties and coma if ingested by dogs. Grape and wisteria vines should also be avoided, and ivy can also be harmful to dogs if eaten in large quantities.

TREES THAT ARE TOXIC TO DOGS

Care should be taken with dogs around two of autumn's best-known trees, oak and horse chestnut, the acorns and conkers they produce could make your dog very poorly if a large quantity is ingested.

Beechnuts, which also fall in autumn, can cause an unpleasant stomach upset. And if swallowed whole, could cause throat blockages.



One of the most toxic trees is the yew, an evergreen often found in churchyards. In extreme cases, yew needles, bark and red berries can be deadly to both dogs and humans.

POISONOUS AUTUMN BERRIES

Both elderberries and holly berries can cause stomach upsets in dogs. But the most dangerous berry-bearing plant is deadly nightshade. Cuckoo pint, aka lords-and-ladies (which produces spikes of orange-red berries), and mistletoe. All are typically found in woodland.



DO DOGS EAT MUSHROOMS AND OTHER FUNGI?

Autumn is the peak season for many wild mushrooms and other fungi. Most of these pose no risk to your pet. However, a small number of fungi can be very dangerous so it's safest to steer dogs clear of fungi altogether. Worst of all is the death cap, an unremarkable-looking woodland mushroom that is thought to be responsible for more poisonings than any other.

DOGS AND BLUE-GREEN ALGAE POISONING

Beware of lakes, ponds and waterways discoloured by blue-green algae. This is a type of bacteria, which resembles algae when clumped together. Blue-green algae may appear as a greenish scum or foam, green flakes, or swirls of green or blue

WHY DOES MY DOG LICK ME?

Dogs lick themselves as part of their natural behaviour for several reasons; grooming, social interactions, nurturing their young and healing, but why do our dogs lick us? Is it for the same reasons? Are they giving us love or is it that we just taste good?! We can't read dogs' minds, so we may never know the answers for sure, but behavioural studies have been done and we can make some well educated assumptions based on these.

AFFECTION

When dogs are young, their mothers spend a lot of time licking them, both to encourage urination and defecation as very young puppies, to keep them clean and as part of the bonding process. Animal behaviourists believe domestic dogs lick their owners to show them affection. When doing this, pleasurable endorphins are released in their brain, and they are left with a positive, happy feeling.

COMMUNICATION

Dogs are pack animals and when living in a multiple dog household, licking plays a large role in communication. They can use their licks to tell each other they're hungry, hurt, or even just to ask to be friends! It is natural then that your dog licks you as a method of communication, the problem is that we don't interpret those licks as well as other dogs. If they are using licks to tell you something though and not a nip, it's probably safe to assume they're saying something nice.

REWARD



Often when dogs lick people, this interaction is reciprocated in that you may start petting them, stroking/tickling/scratching them, or even give them some food. This reinforces the behaviour and dogs will lick you more, because they become aware that they will get something enjoyable by doing so.

EXPLORATION

A dog's tongue is an incredibly sensitive tool. When a dog licks you, they are taking in the sweat and oils from your skin. Sweat contains water, ammonia, sodium, potassium and a whole host of other things from which dogs can draw information about you. When they lick you, they sometimes are just trying to learn a bit more about you.

TASTE

It may seem a little unpleasant to us, but our skin is home to many fascinating tastes! Particles of food, sweat along with grease and bacteria can all taste great to our dog. Sometimes, they're merely enjoying the flavour they get from you.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU WANT YOUR DOG TO STOP! Whilst the reasons for our dog's attentions are generally compassionate, there is no doubt that excessive licking can become an annoyance. If your dog is licking obsessively, you need to curb it as no compulsive behaviour is good for them. If you want to stop your dog's unwanted licking, do not feel guilty and stand firm!

According to pet behaviourist Nick Jones, *'the most effective way to stop your dog licking you seems to be removing the positive affirmation of the behaviour and indicating your disapproval to your canine companion. In future, when your dog licks you, you should ignore them. Move away from them and turn your back. If they are jumping or moving whilst trying to lick you, keep turned*



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!

