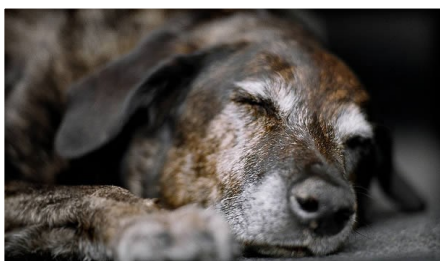


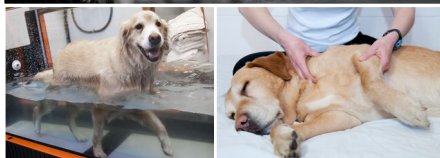
Companion Animal Newsletter - APRIL 2019

IS YOUR COMPANION SLOWING DOWN? SPROUTING A FEW GREY HAIRS?



It happens to us all eventually. We all need to look after ourselves more as the years advance, and there are things we can do to help make it easier for our pets. Exercise can play a huge part in this. Little and often is the exercise regime recommended for older animals, with frequent light exercise being encouraged to improve their circulation.

Some senior canines enjoy pottering and should be given chance to wander in a safe environment. Frequent short walks will help to exercise stiff joints and ensure plenty of opportunities to urinate. However, exercising an arthritic animal can be a balancing act. This condition has its own challenges, as too much exercise can cause pain, yet too little and the condition could worsen, causing the joints to stiffen and ache more. Exercise should be gentle, try going on different routes around your area to see which best suits your dog's needs. Massage can also be used to improve the circulation to the extremities and hydrotherapy is another useful therapy which has many benefits.



Elderly cats often sleep for long periods of time, they should however be encouraged to move around to aid their circulation and benefit joint health. There are lots of different toys, lasers and treat related exercises you can use indoors and outdoors. Keep things playful - the introduction of different games into their routine stimulates their brain and is fun for you too!

Arthritis will become a chronic illness. Joint supplements can help reduce any further damage if used from the early stages of the disease, we can also use pain relief as prescribed by the veterinary surgeon. Pain can sometimes be difficult to spot in our pets, they are quite good at hiding it from us, exhibiting their stoic nature. Nurse clinics are available free of charge at the surgery, and we can discuss signs of what to look for, pain score your pet and advise on care going forward.

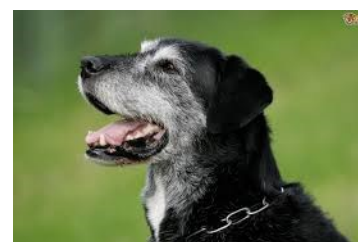
Obesity is common in older patients and weight management is vital. It must be emphasised that excess weight is potentially dangerous to the patient, due to the extra strain placed on the heart, kidneys, liver and musculoskeletal system. Again, we have a lovely nursing team who hold complimentary geriatric clinics to assess your pet and help guide you in caring for your elderly pet.

Veterinary medicine, just like human medicine, has advanced so that we are able to do so much more for our pets and whilst this is fantastic, it also means that our pets are living for longer and the geriatric phase is now a more significant portion of their life. Regular health checks are vital in these latter years but also throughout our pet's lives to keep them as fit, healthy and happy as possible, and hopefully limit problems as they grow older.

SIGNS OF ARTHRITIS

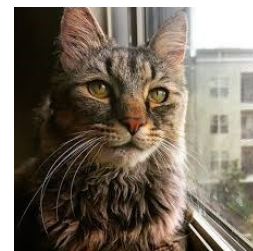
YOUR DOG

- Licking affected joints
- Falling behind on walks
- Reduction in muscle tone/bulk
- Mild swelling/ heat in the joints
- Stiffness on rising or laying down



YOUR CAT

- Lethargic, decreased appetite
- Slight limping or favouring one side
- Difficulty getting into/out of litter box
- Less inclination to jump or climb
- Reduced grooming
- Spending more time lying down



TURN THAT FROWN UPSIDE DOWN

HAPPY VET VISITS

Whilst we would hope all routine vet visits are a happy experience for all our canine patients and their owners, we understand that not all four legged friends enjoy a trip to see us!

Having to battle with your pet when attending the vets is stressful for both the animal and yourself! The good news is there are things we can do as a team to turn the visit around and make those vet trips a positive experience.

Before you need us:



Something we always advise our pet owners with a new dog or puppy, or a dog who is anxious about visits to the vet, is to drop in and see us at the surgery when your pet does **not** need to see the vet and be examined! Just pop in when you are passing; the best part of our day is meeting all your pets and our team are always here to offer treats and make a fuss (if your dog enjoys this kind of attention). They can have a look around the waiting room, stand on the scales and if between surgeries, wander and have a sniff around our consult rooms. This positive reinforcement helps to reassure your dog, the more you call in, the more your dog will recognise our friendly faces and associate the surgery with a positive experience. If they do not associate every visit with having examination or treatment, then on the occasions when they are here to see the vet that visit should be far less stressful.

We always offer a complimentary 'meet and greet' appointment for any new patients we register, this means that pets who have not been to us before are introduced to our vets and the practice in stress free way. This ensures that the relationship between the practice and your pet starts in a positive way, rather than that first meeting being at a time of stress and crisis. None of us are at our best when we feel unwell!

For some dogs it is not coming into the surgery which deters them, but rather what the dog dislikes about their visit is being handled, especially if the vet or vet nurse need to examine parts of the body that are not usually touched or that they are shy of. A great way to make sure your pet is comfortable to be examined is to start preparation for the examination process at home, in an environment where your pet feels safe and settled. This should be introduced as part of your puppy's training, ensuring they are happy to have their mouth opened, paws picked up and examined, and every part of their body touched in a comfortable, stress free manner. This will ensure that, in the future, you are able to give your dog tablets, clip their nails, clean their ears and groom them, and it will also help when they have to be examined or handled by someone else, such as a vet.

Make this preparation training part of their play time rather than a daunting task, look at it as a great opportunity to really bond and something for both of you to enjoy. Remember that as with all training, little and often is best. Start with parts of

the body where they enjoy being petted, quite often chest or behind the ears. Lay your hand on your pet for just a few seconds, then reward with a treat. This 'touch and treat' approach can then gradually be increased to work your way round their whole body including areas the vet or nurse may need to examine – down their legs, under the tail, in their mouth. If your dog looks at all uncomfortable with being touched in this new way, stop immediately. Once they are relaxed with the process you can then lengthen how long you hold your hand on each area.



Once you are here:

Your pet's first experience of any visit to us will be the reception and waiting room area. When booking your appointment let us know if you have a anxious pet and

our reception team will try their best to book you in at a quieter time, or if your pet is happier to wait their turn in the car and then come straight into the consult room we can accommodate this. We also have a small garden area with a bench to wait at in fine weather. Although our waiting area is away from the door a top tip in helping your dog to relax is to sit away from the doors or busy areas. It also helps to keep your dog facing away from other dogs as this can build tension.

Vet Time:

Well done! You got here in a far more relaxed way and had calm time in the waiting room, now our vet or nurse will greet you and your pet and invite you into the consult room. You are in control and you know your pet. Our team rely on you to communicate on your pet's behalf, so please make sure that the vet or vet nurse is aware of any areas your dog dislikes being touched



examination. If you recognise your pet is becoming unhappy, **please let us know**, both our vet and your pet will thank you for speaking up. Growling is a dog's natural way of communicating when they are very unhappy and need to be listened to. No one wants this to escalate and your dog become so unhappy that they have no other option than to bite to get the message across. You know the difference and you will need to educate us in what your pet is trying to tell us.

Summary:

Here is what we have learned to make that visit a happy one:

- Take a trip to the vet when you do not need to
- Touch and treat at home
- Keep your dog relaxed in the waiting area
- Communicate in the consult room

More information and other training tips can be found by visiting: www.dogstrustdogschoo.org.uk/training

(Ref: Dogs trust; Wag feature spring 2019)



COULD YOU TRAIN YOUR CAT TO BE LESS STRESSED ON VET VISITS?

Taking your cat to the vet can be a very stressful experience causing many people to put it off but this really should not be the case! Cats are very good at hiding illness and without regular check ups (at least annually) this can mean that illnesses go undiagnosed and treated which could mean your cat is suffering unnecessarily. It also means that we are unable to prescribe the best routine treatments such as flea, tick and worming products which are prescription-only medicines and can only be dispensed to animals 'under our care' - seen every twelve months.

To be placed into a basket and driven or carried to a strange environment where they will be handled by a stranger is understandably potentially distressing for your cat! However there are many ways to help.. It also makes it more difficult to examine an animal which is already stressed.

A recent study asked the question 'Does carrier training reduce stress during a 10 minute car journey and increase compliance during the veterinary examination?' The answer to this seemed to be that it does. Training a cat to its carrier appeared to make them less stressed about being inside and also easier to handle in a consultation, which actually reduced the time they needed to be handled for!



So what do we mean by carrier training? Well basically it's getting your cat used to going in to and being confined in its cat carrier, but making it a positive NOT a negative experience so they can see the carrier as a safe space rather than a threat. Doesn't that sound good? This means when faced with a cat carrier your cat will just walk in—amazing! It would appear that it is possible to train cats!

The training was carried out using food rewards as a positive reinforcement and was built up in short stages so that the cats got used to going into the basket without fear. Cats were then assessed for subjective signs of stress on the car journey and at the vets. Trained cats appeared to be less stressed under these circumstances and had shorter veterinary examinations, as they were easier to handle.

This can be done with adult cats, but ideally you would start when still a kitten. You would need to get your cat to used to the box first, then getting shut in the box and then short car journeys.

There are also ways of making the car journey less stressful for your cat. Make sure that the carrier is level, secured with a seatbelt and cannot slide around, placing it on a folded towel on the seat can achieve good results. The use of a natural calming spray which is sprayed into the car 15 minutes before the journey can also help. Do not play loud music and make sure that you drive slowly and steadily so that your cat is not flung around inside their carrier! Talk to your cat but **do not get distracted whilst driving**—the cat should be on the back seat, **not** in an area where you can touch and watch them. **Never have your animal loose in the car.**

We offer 'cat only' clinics at the surgery and have a cat waiting area so that your pet is not faced with inquisitive dogs—remember that even if your cat shares a home with a dog, meeting a strange canine is a very stressful experience for them. Check with our receptionists when booking an appointment for a 'cat only' clinic.

Following the guidelines above and positive reinforcement methods that involve a reward (often food), such as clicker training (see link below) can make for an altogether happier experience for both you and your cat. It requires a bit of work initially, but isn't that worth it for a happier, and potentially healthier cat?

<https://www.petplan.co.uk/pet-information/cat/advice/clicker-training-cats/>



PRE ANAESTHETIC BLOODS, DOES YOUR PET NEED THEM ?

Taking your best friend and family member to the vets for a procedure, under anaesthetic, can be a big worry. Having a pre anaesthetic blood screen taken can help to ease that worry a little. We will take a detailed medical history and carry out a full physical examination of your pet, but this cannot tell us everything.

The blood screening can tell us how the internal organs and blood cells of your pet are functioning, something we cannot assess by an external examination alone. It can also help in the future, if your pet ever becomes ill, by giving us baseline values with which to compare.

The blood sample is taken from the jugular vein in the neck or the cephalic vein in the fore leg. Only 1-2ml is needed.

The blood screen looks for :

- Presence of low red blood cells possibly indicating anaemia
- Evidence of dehydration (increased red blood cells and increased protein levels)
- Presence of white blood cells suggesting infection and inflammatory disease
- Also parameters that can be suggestive of particular organ abnormalities, as described further in this article

The blood screen is split into 3 groups: Biochemistry, haematology and electrolytes. Depending on the age or situation of your pet we may also advise to check their thyroid levels, particularly in elderly cats.

Haematology is a complete blood count, looking at red blood cells, white cells and platelets. Platelets are very small cells involved in the clotting mechanism. If a low platelet count is found this could lead to a bleed during the pet's surgery. White blood cell counts can help to identify underlying stress, inflammatory disease and an inability to fight infection and possibly leukaemia. Reduced red blood cells can indicate anaemia or that the body may not be producing enough red cells.

All of these could cause serious surgical complications, the veterinary surgeon will discuss the results with you and the next steps to be taken. Further tests may be required to establish why the results are as they are.

Biochemistry involves many different parameters that can show us the functioning of many different organs within your pet's body. It looks at :

ALKP - Alkaline Phosphate is found in various body tissues including the liver and bone. Elevated levels can indicate liver disease, Cushing's disease (more commonly seen in dogs when the body produces excessive amounts of Cortisol, a stress hormone) and liver damage if the patient has been on steroids

TP - Total Protein, this can indicate dehydration, inflammation and disease of the liver/kidney and intestines

BUN - Blood Urea Nitrogen, produced by the liver and excreted by the kidneys, abnormal levels can indicate disease of these organs

ALT - Alanine Aminotransferase this becomes elevated with liver cell damage

CREA - Creatinine is a by product of muscle metabolism and excreted by the kidneys, if levels of this are elevated it can indicate kidney disease, obstruction of the urinary tract and dehydration

GLU - Blood glucose, increased levels of this can indicate diabetes and particularly stress in cats. Reduced levels can be due to liver dysfunction or certain types of tumours

ALB - Albumin, a protein produced by the liver, reduced levels can tell us there may be chronic liver, kidney inflammation or intestinal disease

CHOL - Cholesterol, can be elevated in a variety of disorders including hypothyroidism

TBIL - Total Bilirubin, a breakdown product of haemoglobin and a component of bile. A parameter can be useful to indicate liver disease and certain types of anaemia

AMYL - Amylase, an enzyme produced by the pancreas to help with digestion, increased levels can suggest pancreatic disease

PHOS - Phosphorus, an indicator of kidney dysfunction

CA - Calcium, increased levels of this can indicate disease of the parathyroid gland, kidneys and certain types of tumours

Electrolytes - Sodium, Potassium, Chloride. The balance of these is important to have a healthy animal. Abnormal levels can be life threatening. They are important when evaluating patients with vomiting, diarrhoea and heart symptoms

If you have any further questions about the blood screen do not hesitate to ask one of our veterinary surgeons or qualified veterinary nurses.



/daleheadvetgroup

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!

