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## Companion Animal Newsletter - SEPTEMBER 2020

### LOOK OUT LOOK OUT - HARVEST MITES ARE ABOUT!

The larvae of harvest mites can cause seasonal skin challenges for dogs and cats particularly during late summer and autumn. The orange/yellow larvae are widely distributed throughout the UK and heavy infestations may be sharply localised, even to the extent of being abundant in one garden and absent from others in the same area.

The larvae congregate in large groups on small clods of earth, long grass, and vegetation such as low bushes and plants. They are active during the day, especially when it is dry and sunny. When a warm-blooded animal passes by, the larvae swarm onto it, congregating in areas where there is little hair and the skin is quite thin. Between the toes, around the base of the ear, groin and armpits are commonly affected areas.

Harvest mite larvae feed by thrusting their small hooked fangs into the skin surface. The larvae do not burrow into the skin or suck blood like ticks, instead they inject a fluid containing powerful digestive enzymes which break down the skin cells. The resulting liquefied skin tissue is then sucked back into the digestive system of the larvae.

The larvae can be recognised as a patch of orange/yellow colour attached to hairs or skin on the body. The larvae will inject and suck for two to three days at the same site until it has increased three to four times in size before dropping off the host, leaving a red swelling on the skin that causes severe itching.

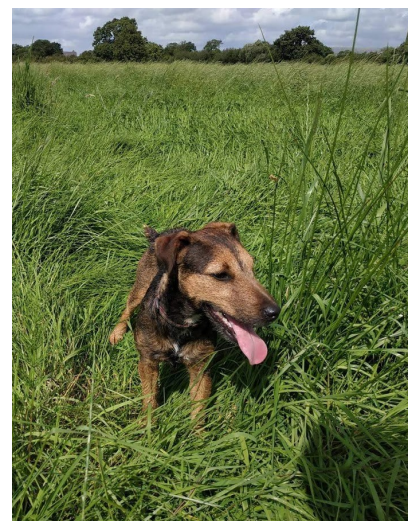
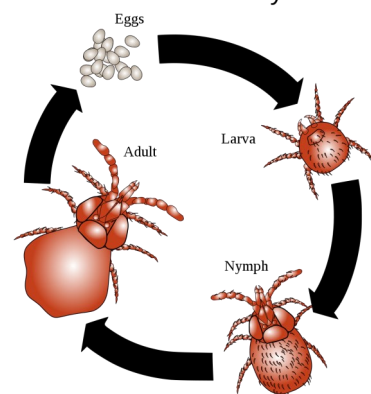
The itching will usually develop within a few hours of exposure to the larvae but can continue for several weeks after they have left the host. This severe itching can lead to rubbing, biting, licking and scratching, leading to scurf and hair loss in a few cases. Pets often make the area very sore and if the skin is damaged these areas can also become infected with bacteria.

Harvest mite larvae are only active during the day, so if you can exercise your pet early in the morning before they become too active, this can help reduce the risk of infestation. If possible, avoiding long grass and vegetation can also help, and keep moving - the worst infestations will occur when sitting down or laying down in a sunny spot in the middle of the day.

There is no licensed treatment for harvest mites available in the UK, however some flea products available from your veterinary practice may treat effectively and can be used off license. If you are concerned your pet has been affected by harvest mites please contact the surgery on 01729 823538 and we can make an appointment to have your pet examined with one of our qualified nurses.



Harvest Mite Life Cycle



# OBESITY IN OUR PETS



We are a nation of animal lovers, however considering **a third of our dogs and a quarter of our cats and rabbits** are thought to be **overweight** or **obese**, are we 'killing our pets with kindness'? Admittedly, there are many factors that can cause our furry friends to pile on the pounds, such as amount of exercise, breed and whether they have been neutered. That aside, giving treats, excess food and tasty human titbits from our plates, is a large part of the battle against obesity in pets.

Interestingly, when we see pets that are **underweight** we instantly (and quite rightly) feel concern for that pet's **health, welfare** and **wellbeing**. However, the same reaction does not occur when we see overweight pets even though this is also a health, welfare and wellbeing concern!

With so many of our pets tipping the scales, seeing a cat, dog or rabbit that is at a 'healthy weight' has become the exception not the rule! This is causing our perception of what a 'healthy body weight' actually looks like to become skewed. Our overweight furry friends are slowly becoming the new 'normal', which is a problem. This is not helped by the fact that we often trivialise pets that are overweight by describing them as 'cute' or 'cuddly'.

So, it's time for us to take some action and help our pets to get back to being a healthy weight and staying there, by feeding them the right food and in the right amounts!

## What are the health risks for obese pets?

More than just affecting their wellbeing, being overweight or obese can make our pets more vulnerable to developing serious and in some cases, life-threatening, health problems, including:

- **Joint problems**
- **Breathing difficulties**
- **Skin problems**
- **Heart problems**
- **Diabetes mellitus**
- **Increased risk of developing tumors**

## How do I know if my pet is overweight or obese?

The best way to check whether your pet is overweight is to bring them to the surgery to weigh them. One of our veterinary nurses will be able to tell you what your pet's ideal weight should be and give advice on reaching and maintaining a healthy weight.

## What's it like being an overweight pet?

From your pet's perspective, lugging all that extra weight around can make them feel **lethargic, reluctant to run** around, **less enthusiastic to play** and ready for another **snooze**.

Being overweight is not fun for your pet and it can impact on their **enjoyment of life** and **wellbeing**.

## How can I help my pet to lose weight?

To help get you started, here are some top-tips to help your pet shed the pounds:

### Type of food

Feeding your **cat** or **dog** a food that has been specially **formulated to help weight loss** is a great idea. These foods are carefully **balanced** and contain **fewer calories**. This means that you can feed your pet a similar amount to before, which will help satisfy your pet and keep hunger at bay.

For **Rabbits**, avoid feeding 'muesli' type food, as this leads to pickiness and has been linked to obesity in rabbits, as has over-feeding with pelleted food. A healthy diet should contain:

- 80% grass or hay (a mound of hay at least as big as your rabbit is perfect)
- 15% leafy greens (an adult handful of leafy greens or veg in the morning and evening)
- Only 5% should be pelleted food (never muesli) (1-2 tablespoons)

Do make sure any changes to the diet are made slowly to give your pet's tummy time to adjust to their new diet.



### Measuring your food accurately

Avoid using cups, as these invite human error and research has revealed that you can end up feeding as much 80% more than intended. So, grab a reliable set of digital scales and carefully weigh out each meal.

### Treats

We understand that giving your pet treats is an important part of bonding with your pet, but they must be given in moderation. A general rule of thumb for cats and dogs is that treats should account for **less than 10% of their daily calorie intake**. If you are using treats for training, then take a little bit of food out of their meal to take this into consideration.

For rabbits, use their pelleted food as a treat; just make sure it is no more than 1-2 tablespoons per day in total.

### Give them plenty of exercise

Introduce exercise gradually to your pet's routine if they are not used to it and make sure older pets come to us for a health check first. You can devise fun and active games in the home for cats to get them more active. Dogs are naturally active animals so exercise alone will not cause weight loss but it certainly helps keep them healthy and happy.

For bunnies, make sure that they have permanent access to a large run every day, and grass. Tunnels, shelves and digging trays can also be great fun for your rabbits and will encourage them to exercise.

### Weigh your pet regularly

Just like us, our pet's weight can creep up so slowly that we may not even notice. It's up to us as their responsible owner to maintain a healthy weight in our pets. So, feel free to call at the surgery for us to weigh your pet.

*ref:MSD Pet Pulse: Pet Obesity & Diet*



## PET STAYCATION KIT – 10 ESSENTIALS

With more of us having to staycation this year, the upside is we can take our dogs with us! Here are 10 essential items to pack for your pet:

- Collar with ID Tag
- Water bowl
- Spiral stake
- Poo bags
- Tick remover
- Routine medication
- Pet first aid kit
- Fun safe toys
- Tasty healthy treats
- Crate or their own bed from home.



Don't forget your medication! If your pet is on repeat medication make sure you have enough to last your stay. Order more in plenty of time, our vets need at least 24 hours notice for repeat prescriptions and if we have not seen your pet for some time your animal may need to be examined by one of our vets before we can dispense further medication.

It is also important that vaccinations and parasite control are up to date before exploring new environments.

# WHAT IS PET DIABETES?

## What is pet diabetes?

Diabetes mellitus is a common condition that affects the concentration of glucose, or sugar, in your pet's blood. Diabetes occurs when your pet's body makes too little insulin, stops producing it completely, or doesn't utilise insulin properly which prevents the conversion of food to energy.

## What happens without insulin?

Without the conversion to energy, extra sugar left in the blood leads to your pet urinating more frequently and consequently drinking excessively as a result. They can also become lethargic, lose weight and have other health problems.

As a result, a pet with diabetes may want to eat constantly, but will appear malnourished because it's body cells can't absorb glucose.

## How can pet diabetes be cured?

Diabetes cannot be cured, but with proper treatment and monitoring your pet can live a long, happy life.

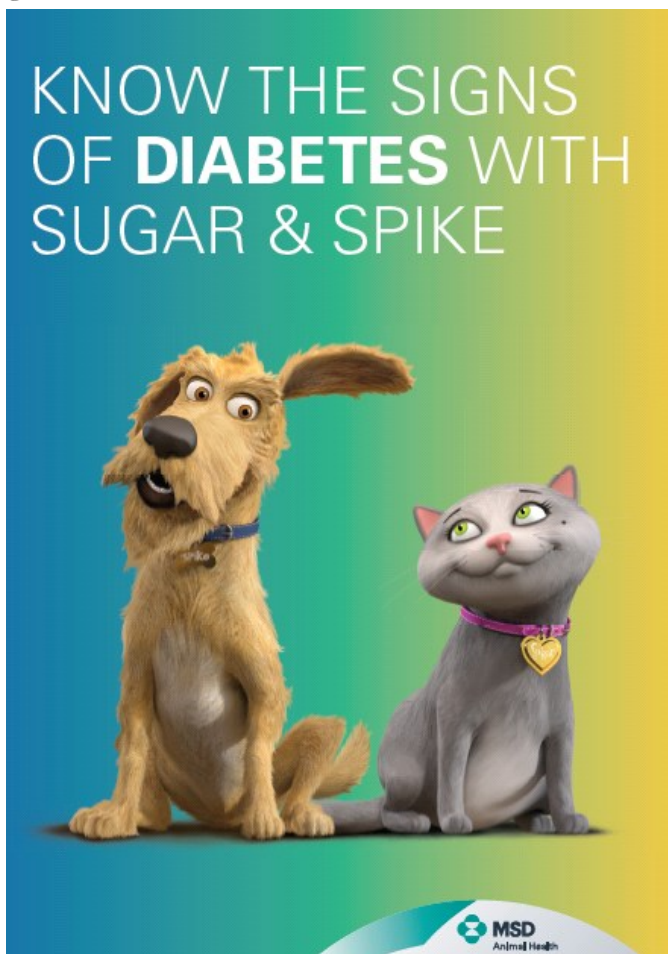
## How common is pet diabetes?

Less than 1% in both dogs and cats

It is estimated that 1 in 300 dogs and 1 in 200 cats in the UK have diabetes.<sup>1,2</sup>

1. Mattin M, et al. (2014). An epidemiological study of diabetes mellitus in dogs attending first opinion practice in the uk. Vet. Record 174: 349

2. O'Neill, d.g. et al. (2016). Epidemiology of diabetes mellitus among 193,435 cats attending primary-care veterinary practices in england. J vet intern med;30, p 964–972



Sugar & Spike want to help you keep your dog or cat happy and healthy. So we've compiled a checklist of signs of diabetes to look out for in your dog or cat. Mark down which signs, if any, your pet exhibits and remember to bring this leaflet with you to your next vet appointment.

- 1** ☐ **Urinates frequently**  
Your dog or cat wants to go outside more often. Your dog may urinate in the house; your cat may urinate outside of their litter box.
- 2** ☐ **Drinks a lot of water**  
You have to fill the water bowl more often than before, or notice your dog or cat drinking from unusual places, such as a toilet bowl.
- 3** ☐ **Is always hungry**  
Your dog or cat never seems to get enough food – they're always begging for food.
- 4** ☐ **Has lost weight**  
Although your dog or cat has a good appetite, they keep losing weight.
- 5** ☐ **Eyes appear cloudy**  
This sign is only present in dogs.
- 6** ☐ **Coat has deteriorated**  
Your dog or your cat has stopped grooming, and the fur becomes dry or dull.
- 7** ☐ **Sleeps more or is less active**  
Your dog or cat used to be energetic, but now they sleep all day.



[www.pet-diabetes.co.uk](http://www.pet-diabetes.co.uk)

This information is provided by MSD Animal Health, the manufacturer of Caninsulin®.  
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Check out our website [www.daleheadvetgroup.co.uk](http://www.daleheadvetgroup.co.uk) for more information about caring for your pet, special offers, vet and staff profiles and much more!

