WINTER 2011/2012

ST. CLAIR VETERINARY GROUP NEWS

- 2 Pottery Street, Kirkcaldy, Fife
- 8 Scoonie Place, Durie Street, Leven
- Cos Lane, Glenrothes

Take our virtual practice tour!

You can now take a look beyond the consulting room and view behind the scenes by clicking on our practice tour at – www.stclairvet.co.uk

Take the opportunity to see the impressive facilities that allow us to care for your pet to the highest possible standards and the full range of services we offer.

At St. Clair our friendly team are dedicated to quality care coupled with kindness and compassion and aim to make your pet's visit to us as pleasant as possible.

Find us now on facebook

Healthcare Plan

A fantastic value way to keep your pet healthy. Our Healthcare Plan includes your pets flea and worm control, all vaccinations (including kennel cough) and routine health check ups for the whole year. **Ask for details.**

Also in this issue:

- *You are what you eat!*
- *Fact File: Ear Disease*
- *Rabbiting on!*

Winter – a seasonal survival guide!

Surviving the winter months can be a challenge for many pets, so here are a few seasonal tips to keep your pet fit and well at this time of year:

Obesity alert! With the nights drawing in, it can be more difficult to find the time to walk your dog and your cat may prefer to settle down in front of the fire rather than getting out and about! Where possible constant exercise levels will help to keep you and your pet fit and healthy. Keep an eye on your pet's weight and please get in touch if your pet is gaining a few extra pounds, since carrying excess weight can have a multitude of adverse effects, including heart disease and diabetes.

Arthritis alert! As well as checking your pet's weight, keep an eye out for signs of joint stiffness. Limps and difficulty rising after a rest are both signs of joint stiffness and pain, which can be made worse by cold weather and also by carrying extra weight (see above). A prompt check of any such signs is advisable as it gives us the best chance of being able to help affected pets.

Festive Hazards! The festive season brings with it a huge range of hazards for our pets! Items such as ribbon and tinsel are very attractive to mischievous pets and, if swallowed, may lead to intestinal blockage. Whilst on the subject of edible items, don't forget that chocolate can be very toxic to dogs – in general the higher the cocoa content the more toxic the chocolate. Additionally, there are now several reports confirming that dogs eating even small amounts of grapes, raisins or sultanas can develop renal failure. Many pets also love chewing house plants however many of these are toxic to pets. Remember to make sure you keep mistletoe away from pets as both the leaves and berries, if eaten, are extremely toxic to pets. If you would like any further information on caring for your pet at this sometimes challenging time, please don't hesitate to ask!

Winter Flea Alert!

With summer sadly now just a distant memory, it can be very tempting to lower your guard against these tiny wingless pests! However with modern central heating, fleas are no longer just the seasonal summer problem they used to be.

For optimum flea control, treatment should be all year round. **Spot-on treatments** are ideal for treating your *pet*, whilst **larvicidal house sprays** can be used to prevent fleas developing in your *home*.

Rabbits in winter

Pet rabbits and guinea pigs also find this time of year very challenging. See our back page article for further information on vaccinations, feeding and keeping them generally fit and well!

Vaccination – is your pet up to date?

Did you know that one of the key reasons pets are living longer is that we are able to **vaccinate** them against a range of **infectious diseases** (such as *parvovirus* in dogs and *feline enteritis virus* in cats) that, without vaccination, pose a deadly threat to our pets.

Provided their mother was vaccinated, puppies and kittens have a certain level of immunity that protects them in the first few weeks of life. However this rapidly falls and, in order to restore it, a **primary course of vaccination** is required to boost their natural immunity and ensure their health and survival. However this immunity will also fade over time and **regular booster vaccinations**, combined with a **health check**, are the best way of protecting your pet, plus keeping an eye out for any other problems.

Don't take any risks with your pet's wellbeing – keep them healthy with regular vaccinations and health checks!

Photos: Warren Photographic

You are what you eat!

We all know the benefits of eating a balanced diet, but did you know that your pet's nutritional requirements actually *change* throughout their lives? The good news is that specially balanced *life-stage* diets are available for every stage of your pet's life, from tiny puppies and kittens, through adulthood and on to old age.

Puppies and kittens require a balanced diet with higher (but not excessive) levels of energy, protein for muscle development and essential fatty acids for a healthy shining coat. The correct mineral balance helps bones and joints develop correctly. This is particularly important for large and giant breeds of dog and they have their own specially formulated puppy food.

Prescription Diets

In addition to life-stage diets, there are also specially formulated "prescription diets" for pets with specific health problems such as diseases of the kidneys, liver, heart, skin, joints and teeth.

Many of the conditions mentioned above require long term management, and prescription diets can play a very useful role in improving the lives of pets with a variety of conditions.

Adult pets, with their major growth phase behind them, require a balanced diet to keep them healthy, but with lower levels of many of the nutrients mentioned above.

Senior Pets: As pets become older, their systems become a little less efficient and if they receive too much of a particular nutrient, their bodies will have to work much harder to clear it. Senior foods are specially formulated with this in mind, with lower energy levels to avoid weight gain (as pets become less active), but with altered protein and mineral levels to reduce the workload of internal organs such as the kidneys.

The good news is that feeding your pet a balanced diet, precisely formulated for their particular *life-stage,* plays a very important role in keeping them fit and well. Please ask us for more information and we can help choose the perfect diet for your pet!

Fact File: Ear Disease

Does your pet show signs of head shaking and ear scratching? These are commonly seen in pets and, combined with other symptoms such as ear redness and discharge – point to ear disease as a problem.

The ear is protected externally by a pinna (or flap). A narrow ear canal carries sound to the ear drum where it passes onto the middle and inner ear.

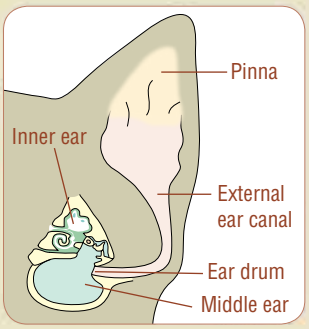
Unlike the situation in humans where middle and inner ear disease is common, most of the problems seen in pets occur in the *external* ear canal – an often very painful condition called otitis externa.

Virtually all otitis externa is triggered by an underlying cause; common underlying causes include: –

- Ear Mite (*Otodectes cynotis*) infestations – commonly seen in puppies and kittens.
- Trapped foreign bodies such as grass awns.
- Localised allergic skin disease affecting the skin lining the external ear canal – often as part of a more generalised skin condition. Inhaled allergies and food allergies will commonly present in this way.

In order to effectively treat ear disease, it is important to determine the *underlying cause* of the problem, however this is often obscured and made worse by *secondary* opportunistic bacterial and fungal infections.

If your pet is showing symptoms of ear disease it is important that we examine them and establish the underlying cause of the problem as soon as we can. This will involve an examination of your pet's ear plus further lab tests in some cases. In common with many conditions, *early diagnosis* and treatment gives us the best chance of curing ear disease in pets.



The ear in cross section. Most ear problems occur in the external ear canal

Otitis externa in a cat with ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*). The photo shows the characteristic crusty brown discharge in the external ear canal

Electron micrograph of the ear mite – *Otodectes cynotis*

Rabbiting on!

Rabbits are very popular as pets, and just as with other pets, need regular vaccinations and health checks to keep them fit and well.

They can be **vaccinated** against two potentially fatal infectious diseases:

- Myxomatosis is a viral infection spread by blood sucking insects such as rabbit fleas and mosquitoes. The virus multiplies on the skin leading to blindness and difficulty in eating. Rabbits become very ill and sadly many die from this distressing condition.
- Viral Haemorrhagic Disease can be spread *directly* between rabbits or *indirectly*, via contaminated hutches, bedding or food. Symptoms include loss of appetite, nose bleeds, lethargy and sudden death.

Turning to **feeding**, did you know that rabbits have continuously growing teeth? This enables wild rabbits to graze all day on grass and other abrasive foods without wearing out their teeth! Feeding your pet rabbit the correct diet is equally important and should consist mainly of hay and grass, together with a selection of fresh food, and a small amount of good quality commercial rabbit food, with pelleted foods to avoid the problem of selective feeding.

Shelter: The winter months can be very challenging for pets that live outside. It is important to ensure that their hutches are warm, dry and clean and have plenty of bedding. Water bottles should be checked regularly to ensure they have not become frozen.

Finally, if you have any questions on caring for your pet rabbit – please ask a member of our practice team!

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