



# WOODCROFT VETERINARY GROUP

# NEWS

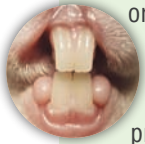
AUTUMN 2016

## Rabbiting on!



Rabbits are very popular as pets but have very different needs to dogs or cats. Here are some tips to keep them fit and well:

**Diet:** Rabbits have continuously growing teeth so they need *ad lib* quantities of good quality hay and/or ideally grass – available 24 hours a day, every day, to wear down their teeth.



Dental disease is a common problem in rabbits and is due in part to incorrect diets allowing tooth overgrowth. A high fibre diet is also essential to keep their digestive system working well. They can also eat a handful of safe washed leafy green vegetables, herbs and weeds daily. Only feed treats such as carrots or apples in small quantities. A small daily portion of high quality pellets or nuggets are also appreciated!

**Vaccinations:** We recommend vaccination against two potentially fatal infectious diseases:

- Myxomatosis – an infection spread by blood sucking insects such as rabbit fleas and mosquitoes.
- Viral Haemorrhagic Disease – spread directly between rabbits or indirectly, via contaminated hutches, bedding or food.

**Two's company!** Rabbits are by nature social creatures and can be housed with another friendly neutered rabbit. A good combination is a neutered female with a neutered male that have been brought up together. Rabbits will also enjoy spending time with people, particularly if gentle handling is encouraged from a young age.

We are here to help! Please ask us for further information on dental care, correct feeding, vaccinations and general rabbit care.

## To neuter is cuter! Benefits of pet neutering



Did you know that in addition to preventing unwanted pregnancies, there are many other health and behavioural benefits to having your pets neutered? Neutered pets are likely to live longer, healthier lives thanks to surgical procedures which are safe, quick and relatively painless.

**Dogs:** For female dogs the benefits of spaying are very clear. If left entire, the chances of them developing mammary (breast) cancer and life-threatening infections in their uterus are very high. Also, you don't have the practical considerations of them being in season (heat) every six months; when they will bleed, be attractive to the advances of every male dog in your area and be more likely to run away to find a mate.

In male dogs, castration eliminates testicular cancer and makes prostate problems less likely. Also, for some it can have very positive effects on their behaviour.



**Cats:** For both male and female cats, neutering is imperative! Female cats can come into heat as often as every two weeks during the breeding season (which occurs in the spring and summer months) and will endlessly try to escape and mate with local tom cats.

For un-neutered females coming into heat – if they go outside (even just once!) they will in all likelihood get pregnant and add to the cat population, which already hugely outnumbers the available homes. They will also be vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, wounds from the males they mate with and they are also very likely to develop mammary cancers and uterine infections.

For toms, castration is equally important. Entire male cats wander and fight, putting them at risk of being run over by cars, getting nasty infected fight wounds and exposing them to deadly infectious diseases. In fact, a neutered male cat is likely to live a whole decade longer than a entire one!

For further information on neutering your pets, please contact a member of our practice team.



**Rabbits** will generally benefit from being neutered. Both sexes make much better, calmer pets and are also much more likely to live peacefully with others. Entire rabbits will often fight, even if related. Also over 80% of older female rabbits may suffer with, and often die from, uterine cancer.

Images: Warren Photographic



## Choosing the ideal diet for your pet!

When choosing a diet for your pets, the range and variety of diets can be over-whelming. So how do you decide which is best for your pets? 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 to senior pets.

**Puppies and kittens** require specially formulated diets with higher (but not excessive) levels of energy, protein for muscle development and essential fatty acids for a healthy shining coat. **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** are vulnerable to many health issues, and specially formulated diets typically contain supplements to soothe arthritic joints and help heart, brain and kidney function.

If you are wondering about how to ensure your pet's diet is a perfect fit for them and their lifestyle, please come and speak to us – there are a range of great options to choose from!



## Autumn alert!



Summer is sadly over! The weather is cooling and the nights are drawing in. It is time to hunker down and light the fire. However, it is not the time to take your eye off the ball with our pets!

**Flea alert:** Autumn is the favourite time of year for fleas! Although it is colder outside, the heating in our

houses turns them into flea paradises. Keep an eye out for these annoying pests and of course keep up your pets' flea treatments.

**Troublesome ticks:** Ticks also enjoy the Autumn as they thrive in the more humid conditions outdoors. Ticks live in long grass and woodland areas waiting to latch on to passing pets. Once attached, ticks feed on your pet's blood – often for several days.

The main issue with ticks is that they can carry diseases in their saliva which they can potentially transmit to pets:

- **Lyme disease** is the primary tick borne pathogen in the UK and Ireland and can affect dogs and humans, and is carried by a small percentage of *Ixodes* ticks. Affected pets often show signs of arthritis, fever, lack of appetite and lethargy.
- **Babesiosis** is a tick borne disease which may affect dogs (but not humans) travelling to and from mainland Europe. It is caused by a tiny blood borne parasite *Babesia* which destroys red blood cells. Signs include dark red urine, pale or yellow gums, lethargy and fever. A recent outbreak of Babesiosis on the UK mainland (in Harlow, Essex) marks a further development in the spread of Babesiosis. This recent UK outbreak is very localised but it is important to be vigilant when travelling into at risk areas.

**Obesity awareness:** With the shorter days, the opportunities to exercise for both cats and dogs is less. So make sure you monitor their weight to ensure they don't put on a layer of winter blubber! Think about buying puzzle toys and feeders, these will keep them entertained and help get rid of some energy.

**Arthritis:** The cold can creep into the joints of older pets, making them stiff and sore. If you are concerned, come and talk to us about the medications and supplements that can help pets.



Additionally – watch out for falls of apples or conkers, both cause nasty tummy upsets if your dog eats too many. Also, if you need to use anti-freeze in the car, ensure there are no leaks and that the containers are well out of reach, as it is deadly to our pets.

Enjoy the Autumn weather and get in touch if you have any concerns!

## When did your pet last have a check-up?

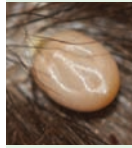


When did your pet last see us for a check-up? Animals are extremely good at hiding signs of illness and pain and it can be very hard for owners to spot the subtle signs of problems. This is especially true of chronic conditions like arthritis, dental disease and kidney problems.

A good example of this is an older cat whose appetite has recently changed. An *increased* appetite is not an uncommon finding in older cats and should not be ignored since it may be a sign of hyperthyroidism; here an overactive thyroid gland increases the metabolic rate. Conversely, a *decreased* appetite may signal a range of underlying problems including dental and kidney problems.

The regular booster visit is a great time for us to give your pet a check over and ask you how things are going. So if we haven't seen them for a while, give us a call today!

### Check your pets for ticks!



Parting the coat reveals an *Ixodes* tick. These are widespread across the UK

and Ireland and may be infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the organism that causes Lyme disease in dogs and humans.



*Dermacentor* ticks can potentially carry *Babesia* organisms, the cause of

Babesiosis in dogs. These ticks are found in mainland Europe and parts of the UK.

### Effective tick control

Prevention of tick-borne disease in pets can be achieved by:

- **Daily monitoring for ticks** plus careful removal of ticks with a tick remover (see below).



- **Chemical tick prophylaxis** with veterinary anti-parasitic products that rapidly kill, repel or expel ticks are all useful in reducing tick feeding and therefore disease exposure.



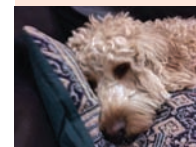
## Firework Fright!!

The firework season is nearly here! The early nights are perfect for displays but if your pet finds them frightening, then night-time can become a nightmare for pets.

We recommend starting a desensitisation programme several months in advance. Podcasts of firework noises are available free from the Dogs Trust website. These should be played to your pets starting off quietly and building up the volume. Done correctly, it normalises the sounds for your pets and means they don't react to the real thing!

### So how can you help your pets on Firework night?

**Tire them out!** Give your dog a really good walk and a big meal, both of which will make them sleepy. Also, make sure you keep the cat flap locked and that all your pets are microchipped, just in case they take fright and escape.



### Provide a den!

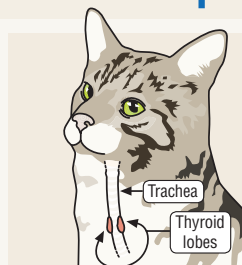
Animals feel much more secure in small spaces and it will help to

muffle the noises – as does keeping the curtains closed and the TV on.

**Use Adaptil and Feliway:** These are calming pheromone products that help to reduce anxiety. They are both available as plug-in diffusers, best positioned close to where your pet sleeps. Feliway also comes in a spray that can be sprayed on bedding and Adaptil as a collar. Ask us about them and how they can help!

Additionally, although we need to comfort our pets when they are frightened, it is important not to be too over-effusive because this can encourage attention seeking behaviour. The best time to praise them is when they are being calm and relaxed.

Finally, some pets simply cannot cope and they need sedative medications. If you think your dog or cat might benefit from these, please come and have a chat with us.



**Diagram:** showing position of the thyroid lobes and trachea

The thyroid gland consists of two tiny lobes, located on either side of the trachea (windpipe). The thyroid gland produces thyroid hormone which regulates your pet's metabolic rate. Excess thyroid hormone leads to an increased metabolic rate.