



NEWS Letter

Issue 27, Autumn 2005

Welcome to our autumn newsletter. Once again we have contributions from several staff members.

This issue includes articles on:

- **Hip Dysplasia** – can it be prevented?
- **Urinary Incontinence** – does your dog leak?
- **Blue Tongued Lizards** – caring for injured wildlife.
- **Some new poisons** – household dangers to your pet.
- **Senior Pets** – what's normal and what isn't?

There are also a number of other short articles, and some updates on our web site. As always, we'd appreciate any comments that you have on our newsletter, and any suggestions for future issues.

This will be my last newsletter. Alison will be taking over the organisation of the newsletter from now on. I hope that you have found this newsletter useful over the last 7 years, and that you continue to enjoy it in the future, under Alison's direction.

I have decided to leave Ingleburn Vet Hospital, and will be taking up a full-time position at another vet clinic. I will only be here until the end of March and so may not see some of you again. I would like to take this opportunity to say goodbye and to thank you for trusting me with the care of your pets over the last 11½ years. Have a Happy Easter. - Peter

Easter / Holiday Hours

Good Friday 25th March: Closed
Easter Saturday 26th March: 9am – 12 noon
Easter Sunday 27th March: Closed
Easter Monday 28th March: 10am – 12 noon
Anzac Day Monday 25th April: 10am – 12 noon
Phone **9829 1947** at any time for emergencies.

Ingleburn Festival is on again this year on Saturday 19th March. The festival usually includes a fireworks display – something that many of our canine friends don't enjoy! If your dog is scared of fireworks (or thunderstorms), there are a number of things that can be done to make things easier for them. With the right training, we may even be able to cure your dog's anxiety completely. Read our "Fear of Noises" handout or talk to a member of our staff.



Hip Dysplasia

Hip dysplasia is an abnormality in the development of the hip joint. It creates laxity (excessive movement) within the joint which causes abnormal wear, arthritis and pain. Hip dysplasia is most common in large breed dogs such as Rottweilers, German Shepherds, Labradors and Retrievers. The causes of hip dysplasia are complex. Certainly genetics (breeding) is involved but nutrition can also be a factor in the development of the disease. There are a variety of treatments available, and the most appropriate treatment depends on the age of the dog and the severity of the problem. This ranges from exercise, diet and anti-arthritic drugs, right through to total hip replacement surgery. Of course prevention is the best cure! So how can you prevent hip dysplasia?

This advice is only really applicable to high-risk breeds:

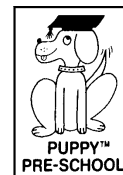
- ❑ If possible, when buying a puppy, ask to see hip score reports of the parents.
- ❑ Restrict food intake to young dogs of susceptible breeds (to approx. 80% of what they'd normally eat) and switch from puppy to adult food when they reach 80% of their adult body weight.
- ❑ Ask to have your dog assessed for hip dysplasia at 5 months of age when they are being desexed (including manipulation of the hips and X-rays). Hip dysplasia can sometimes be corrected if surgery is done at this early age.
- ❑ Don't breed from dogs with hip dysplasia. Have your dog hip scored before deciding to proceed with breeding.

If you have any other questions about hip dysplasia, please speak to one of our vets, or use the *Ask the Vet* service on our web site. - Peter

Puppy Preschool

Congratulations to our recent graduates:

Lucky Jones, Lily Davis, Daisy Weatherley, Tinkerbelle Messer, Foxie Frost, Jack Shipley, Scotty Pratt and Bubbles Ochoa.



Puppy Preschool is an early socialisation and basic training program for young puppies and their owners. We recommend it for all pups. Ask us for details.

Pets in Emergencies

The EMA (Emergency Management Australia) has issued an Action Guide concerning the safety and welfare of pets in an emergency/disaster. Copies of this short guide are available (free of charge) at our hospital or can be viewed on our web site.

Help! My dog is leaking!

Have you noticed wet patches on your pet's bedding after they've been lying down? Does your dog leave drips on the floor after sitting in the same place for some time? They may be suffering from urinary incontinence!

Urinary incontinence means to lose control over the act of urination, and is a common problem in dogs. Although there are several causes of urinary incontinence, the most common is a weakening of the urethral sphincter (the muscle around the neck of the bladder). This is called urethral sphincter incompetence. It is most common in desexed female dogs and can occur from months to years after desexing. There are many factors that result in this type of incontinence. Lack of hormonal stimulation on the sphincter muscle, the length of the urethra (the tube that runs from the bladder to the genitalia) and the body condition of your dog will all play a role. Overweight dogs with short urethras are more likely to develop this problem.

In diagnosing urinary sphincter incompetence, we must rule out other causes of incontinence such as bladder infections (cystitis), diseases that cause your dog to drink more (eg. diabetes), and problems that prevent your dog from getting up to urinate (eg. arthritis). This involves a thorough evaluation of the dog's history, examining the dog and testing a urine sample.

The good news is that this is a treatable condition! Traditionally we treated urethral sphincter incompetence with a type of oestrogen, but this therapy has potential side effects and only works in approximately 50-65% of dogs. A newer treatment became available in Australia



18 months ago that is much more effective and has fewer side effects. It comes in the form of a syrup, administered in the food. We also recommend weight loss for overweight dogs, as this can improve our chance of success.

What does this mean for your dog?

- If you have a dog that is leaking urine at home, don't despair. We CAN help!
- Although this type of incontinence is more common after desexing, this does not change our recommendation to desex your dog! Desexing prevents a range of other medical and behavioural problems in your dog. Please see our "*Should I get my pet desexed*" handout for more information.
- This type of urinary incontinence is rare in male dogs. We can attempt treatment with the same new product, but it is less effective. *-Alison*

Feed rabbits lots of hay

In Newsletter 22, we talked about feeding rabbits and said that they are best fed pellets. This is now considered incorrect. Rabbits are best fed lots of good quality grass hay and some vegetables. This is very important for the health of their teeth! They can have a small amount of pellets. The other advice we gave is still correct and the whole article can be found on our web site. *- Mark*

Blue tongued lizards

Recently we have seen many sick or injured blue tongued lizards. We are currently in the peak of the breeding season for blue tongues; therefore there is an increased number of these reptiles. They are common in suburbia especially found in gardens and around creeks. Due to this they often become victims to dogs, cats and lawnmowers.

Here at Ingleburn Veterinary Hospital we provide free medical and surgical



care for sick and injured wildlife during our office hours. This includes blue tongued lizards.

If you happen to discover an injured blue tongued lizard it is best that you keep it as warm and dry as possible until you are able to get it to us. A simple cardboard box and a small bed lamp for heat (25-40W globe) is all you need to do this. Water should also be provided in a small shallow dish. It is important to remember that these reptiles are wild and they can bite when threatened. They are also known to 'drop' their tails as an escape mechanism. Blue tongues are not venomous but their bite can be quite painful. If you happen to get bitten you should bath the wound with a mild disinfectant to avoid infection, and consult your doctor.

With all sick and injured wildlife it is essential to be careful – do not risk injury to yourself.

We care for wildlife in association with WIRES, who are able to arrange for a foster carer until the animal is able to be released. Euthanasia may be performed if it is deemed necessary – if the animal is unable to be treated. Unfortunately we are unable to provide free after hours service and in these circumstances you may need to care for the animal yourself until we re-open. Alternatively you could contact WIRES directly on 8977 3333.

-Nicole

Feline Aids Vaccine

Last newsletter, we mentioned the imminent arrival of a new cat vaccine against Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). This vaccine is now available but we think there are still some uncertainties about its use, which need to be resolved. So for now, we will not be recommending it routinely as part of our normal vaccination program. However some cats, especially those that roam and fight, are at higher risk of being infected with Feline AIDS. If your cat is in this group, feel free to speak to one of our vets about FIV vaccination.

Environmental Plan

We take environmental management pretty seriously here at the hospital. Under Mark's watchful eye, we recycle everything imaginable, and do whatever else we possibly can to minimise our effects on the environment. Mark has written a brief environmental management plan for the hospital and we've posted it on our web site for anyone who's interested.

Some New Poisons

Late last year, one of our journals had some articles about poisonings that are considered “new”, as the poison may be new or used in a new way.

Hexamine. This chemical is used in fire logs and briquettes or tablets for camping. These products are 100% hexamine and exposure to it can cause skin and eye irritation, coughing if inhaled and abdominal pain and vomiting if eaten. It is excreted in the urine and can cause irritation to the lining of the bladder and bloody urine. A Labrador ate eight 20g hexamine solid fuel tablets from a camping kit and got severe bloody urine. It recovered OK

Paintballs. Apparently, its becoming common for dogs to eat paintballs, though we haven't seen any cases. Different brands have different ingredients, so the toxic dose is unknown. Symptoms can be things like vomiting, diarrhoea, shaking and being unsteady, but dogs can get lots of other symptoms too. Most dogs recover in 24hours. A Labrador (notice the trend here?) ate 15 paintballs and that was enough to make him sick.

Macadamia nuts. Unshelled nuts can cause intestinal blockage, in which case the dog will vomit a lot and be very unwell, but the shelled nuts can be poisonous, even with fairly small amounts. Symptoms can be weakness, joint and muscle pain, shaking, unsteadiness, vomiting and depression. Chocolate covered macadamia nuts could be doubly toxic. We're not sure how many Labradors ate Macadamia nuts!

Xylitol sweetener. This is used as a sugar substitute. If dogs eat it, it makes them produce lots of insulin, so their blood glucose drops and they can get a “hypo” or hypoglycaemic episode. The symptoms of this are weakness, staggering, collapse and fits. Giving some sugar should help but the effects last a long time and the dog will need to be put on a drip in hospital.

Wood glues. Some glues used in wood working expand a lot when setting and so form plugs in the intestines several hours after Labradors, sorry any dogs, eat them. Surgery is needed to remove them.

So keep these things out of the reach of dogs and probably children. If you think you're dog has eaten any of these things or anything else toxic, call us on 9829 1947, or the Animal Emergency Centre on 9758 8900. And for all those Labrador owners, the jokes above probably should be taken seriously, as they will eat almost anything! Rapidly. - Mark

Staff Training

Staff training is a continual part of our aim to provide our patients with high quality health care.

Peter has recently attended these 2 courses:

Urgency in Emergency – an intensive 5-day seminar on emergency medicine and critical care. It included topics like resuscitation, treatment of shock, anaesthesia, snake bites, poisoning, emergency surgery and fluid therapy.

Clinical Haematology and Transfusion Medicine – a 1-day course from an overseas specialist on anaemia, bleeding disorders and blood transfusions.



What's new on our web site?

Hyperthyroidism – a common cause of weight loss in middle-aged and older cats.

Your New Puppy – Starting off on the right paw and **Your New Kitten – A Bundle of Fun** with training advice from a behavioural specialist.

The Cost of Compassion – FAQs on the cost of veterinary health care.

For full details go to...
www.ingleburnvet.com.au
and click on the **What's New** link.

How Many Dogs Does It Take to Change A Light Bulb?

We asked some patients to see if we could find out. Here are their responses:

Golden Retriever: *“The sun is shining, the day is young, we've got our whole lives ahead of us, and you're inside worrying about a stupid burned out bulb?”*

Border Collie: *“Just one. And then I'll replace any wiring that's not up to code.”*

Dachshund: *“You know I can't reach that stupid light.”*

Rottweiler: *“Make me.”*

Boxer: *“Who cares? I can still play with my squeaky toys in the dark.”*

Lab: *“Oh, me, me!!!! Pleeeeeeeeeze let me change the light bulb! Can I? Can I? Huh? Huh? Huh? Can I? Pleeeeeeeeeze, please, please, please!”*

German Shepherd: *“I'll change it as soon as I've led these people from the dark, check to make sure I haven't missed any, and make just one more perimeter patrol to see that no one has tried to take advantage of the situation.”*

Jack Russell Terrier: *“I'll just pop it in while I'm bouncing off the walls and furniture.”*

Old English Sheep Dog: *“Light bulb? I'm sorry, but where's the light?”*

Chihuahua: *Yo quiero Taco Bulb.*

Pointer: *“I see it, there it is, there it is, right there.”*

Greyhound: *It isn't moving. Who cares?”*

Kelpie: *“First, I'll put all the light bulbs in a little circle....”*

Poodle: *“I'll just blow in the Border Collie's ear and he'll do it. By the time he finishes rewiring the house, my nails will be dry and my owner will have my dinner ready.”*

The Cat's Answer: *“People change light bulbs. So, the real question is: How long will it be before I can expect some light, some dinner, and a massage?”*

- Submitted by Alison

Got a good joke about pets? Go to the new Humour page on our web site and submit your joke. But please remember that some of our cat owners won't appreciate too many "dead cat" jokes!

Senior Pets – what’s normal?

We’re often asked by owners to define what is normal and what is abnormal for their senior dogs and cats. Although many of the changes mentioned here are common developments as your pet ages, it does not mean that they should be ignored! It is important to schedule regular health checks to ensure your pet is comfortable as they age, and in between health checks, to be observant, as changes can occur slowly.

Lumps and bumps:

It is fairly common for dogs to develop lumps on the skin as they age. One of the most common lumps that we see is a *lipoma*, a fatty lump. These are soft lumps that lie in the tissue underneath the skin. Cysts and wart-like lumps can also be found on our older pets. However, there are a number of cancers that can also cause skin lumps, and if you find any lump on your pet, it should be examined by a vet. It is important to take note of when a lump first appeared and whether it has changed at all over time. Warning signs that may indicate a lump is of a nastier type are:

- Growing a lot in a short period of time
- Changing colour
- Becoming hard, irregular or itchy
- Bleeding from the surface.

If signs such as these are seen, we may recommend that we biopsy or remove the lump and have it sent to the laboratory to be identified.

Arthritis:

You may have noticed that your pet is having difficulty getting up out of bed, is reluctant to exercise or is struggling more while climbing stairs. These are all signs of joint pain (arthritis). Arthritis can be managed with anti-arthritic and pain relief medication, which is very important in ensuring our dogs and cats are comfortable as they age. Refer to our arthritis handout for more information.

Dental disease:

Our pets tend to smell more from everywhere as they age! Tartar build-up and gingivitis are common problems in dogs and cats. Dental disease not only causes unattractive bad breath, it can cause severe pain. It can also cause heart or kidney disease (from spread of bacteria from the gums into the bloodstream).

To help prevent dental disease:

- Check your pet’s mouth regularly for yellow or brown stains on the teeth and/or redness in the gums
- Feed raw bones 2-3 times a week
- If bones aren’t doing the job, consider switching to a specialised oral care diet (such as the Hill’s t/d)
- A simple scale and polish can be carried out in our hospital to prevent progression of the disease and we can remove any loose or rotten teeth, giving your pet a much healthier and pain free smile!

Weight gain

Our older pets tend to be less active, and diseases such as arthritis and heart disease may contribute to this. This means that they are also much more inclined to put on

weight! As they age and exercise less, we need to reduce their calorie intake to prevent weight gain. A number of “senior” or “light” foods are available for this purpose, such as the Hill’s Science Diet Senior products, or if your pet is already overweight, the Hill’s Prescription Diet r/d formula is specially designed for weight loss.

Weight loss

Weight loss can be a sign of disease, especially in our older cats. Cats are prone to developing kidney failure and hyperthyroidism, and weight loss is a sign of both of these diseases. If you notice that your pet is losing weight, we recommend a health check and blood and urine tests to ensure their kidneys, liver and thyroid gland are functioning normally.

Sight and sound

You may notice your dog’s eyes becoming cloudy as they age. This can be a normal change called *nuclear sclerosis*, where the lens inside the eye hardens with time and is seen as a bluish haze. Although their vision is reduced, nuclear sclerosis does not cause blindness. *Cataracts*, which are seen as an opaque white lens inside the eye, do cause blindness and can occur in dogs of all ages. In our older pets, it can be simply an age related change or it can be secondary to diseases such as diabetes or glaucoma.

You might find that with time, your dog doesn’t come when called or obey voice commands. Loss of hearing is a reasonably normal change in our older pets.

Urinary Incontinence

Our older pets can “leak urine” as they age. In all cases we recommend a full examination and urine check. Please see our article on urinary incontinence in this month’s newsletter!

Drinking more than usual

There are many diseases that can cause a dog or cat to drink more. Diseases include kidney disease and hyperthyroidism (in cats), diabetes, liver disease and other endocrine (hormonal) diseases. To help with diagnosis, we will probably recommend taking blood for full blood tests and examining a urine sample.

Behaviour Changes

A change in the blood flow to the brain can cause behaviour changes in older dogs, such as lethargy, reduced appetite, persistent barking, disorientation, irritability, loss of house training and reduced social interaction. This is known as Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome. There is medication available to counter these effects and improve their quality of life.

Is there any good news?

Of course there is! Experiencing our pet’s journey into old age is a rewarding experience. Deaf or not, our older pets are more content to spend time with us and listen to our problems. As their age advances, so does the bond we have with our pets. They are our family members, our friends, our confidantes, and even our soul mates. We are lucky that we can now help them age comfortably and gracefully so that they can continue to play these roles in our lives.

- Alison