

Firework Fright!

Whilst so much has changed in our lives over the past few months, it is still likely that fireworks will



continue to plague the lives of many pets.

With this in mind, we have put together some tips to keep your pets safe and well at this time of year.

Firstly, try to make sure all pets are inside well before darkness falls. Lock the cat flap and take dogs on a good walk during the day to tire them out. Making a den is an excellent idea for dogs. Any small space will do – cover it over, put their bed inside, add a few treats and encourage them to rest in it. Also, putting the TV on and closing the curtains will disguise



the sounds and will help to make things seem as 'normal' as possible.

Many stressed pets will benefit from calming supplements, or anti-anxiety pheromones (Adaptil for dogs and Feliway for cats). These both provide a gentle, but effective, way to help them relax. These should be started at least 48 hours before fireworks are due to start. For the more severely affected, sedatives may also be required.

For stressed pets, get in touch and talk to us about how we can help!

Opening Hours

Monday to Friday: 8am to 6pm

Saturday: 8am to 12pm

Sunday: Closed

Please contact us to book an appointment.

In the event of an emergency out of hours, please call Vets Now in Swindon on 01793 603800.

Parasites: Don't get caught on the hop!



Although we will doubtless be battling the effects of Covid-19 for some considerable time, it's worth remembering that the parasites that can make our pet's lives a misery have not been on lockdown and have been merrily breeding in the warmer summer months. With Autumn now upon us, we take a look at two of the biggest offenders and

what you can do to protect your pet *and* your home!

Fleas love the warm weather, and in addition to your home, they thrive outside in parks and gardens. Here, any dormant flea eggs from last year will rapidly hatch out into adult fleas. These hop onto passing pets, bringing dozens of these tiny pests back into your home. Adult fleas feed on your pet's blood, causing a range of problems including itchy skin, rashes and hair loss.



Worse still, they hop off our pets and make their home in pet beds, carpets and soft furnishings, where the flea life-cycle is perpetuated.

The best way to prevent fleas is year-round treatment for all your pets with veterinary-licensed flea products. These are extremely effective at killing fleas and they kill them *before* they lay their eggs, thus preventing house infestations. Some work even before they bite (vital for sensitive pets) and some can have an effect on the environment as well. Many veterinary spot-ons are multipurpose and will kill other parasites including scabies, ear mites, ticks and worms. Our staff are able to recommend the best treatments for your pets.

Ticks are another seasonal problem. As the summer turns into the Autumn, so tick numbers are at their highest. Ticks live in long grass and woodlands, waiting to attach themselves to passing pets, and feeding off their blood for several days. Unlike fleas, ticks are not itchy, but can spread a range of diseases. These are discussed in further detail below this article.

The good news is that current evidence suggests that tick-borne diseases take many hours after tick attachment to be transmitted. Using a product that rapidly kills or repels ticks will help to reduce the risk of these diseases. No tick product is 100% effective however, so pets should also be checked for ticks every 12-24 hours and, any found, removed with a special tick remover.

If you would like further information on flea and tick prevention, or parasite prevention more generally, please ask a member of our practice team – we are happy to help.

Checking for fleas

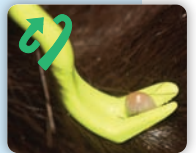


Whilst it is often difficult to find live fleas, specks of flea "dirt" (faeces) in the coat points to a flea problem.

Removing ticks

Attached ticks with buried mouthparts are often found whilst grooming your pets.

Ticks are best removed with a specially designed tick hook with a twisting action.



Focus on tick-borne diseases



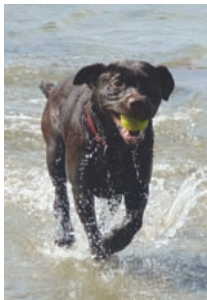
As mentioned above, ticks can spread a range of deadly diseases which pose serious health risks to both pets *and* humans. The major ones are:

Lyme disease, also called borreliosis, is spread by ticks; affected pets (and also humans) can develop swollen joints and stiffness. They can also develop a fever, anorexia and lethargy. In some cases the disease causes life-threatening kidney disease. **Babesiosis** (caused by *Babesia canis*) is an emerging tick-borne disease, destroying red blood cells and causing acute signs of anaemia in affected dogs. **Erlchiosis** also attacks red blood cells and can be fatal.

Both Babesiosis and Erlchiosis are particularly prevalent abroad, so if you take your dog abroad on holiday, it is essential to protect them against ticks.

We are here to help – our team are here to advise you on the best products to kill or repel ticks and also reduce the risk of tick-borne diseases. Please don't hesitate to get in touch!





Autumn aches

For some pets, fewer walks in lockdown has led to them gaining some unwanted extra weight. Did you know carrying extra weight puts a strain on organs such as the heart and lungs, and especially the joints?

Why is this important? Because if your pet has arthritic joints, excess weight will make the problem worse.

The joints that are most susceptible to arthritis are those permitting free limb movements – called *synovial* joints. Examples are the elbow, knee and hip joint. The ends of the bones that meet at these joints are covered by very smooth articular cartilage.

Arthritis develops when this cartilage becomes roughened and cracked. Most commonly this is due to general ageing, but poor joint conformation, e.g. hip dysplasia, will make things worse and often cause problems earlier in life. Cartilage damage results in exposure of the underlying bone, causing joint pain.

Signs of arthritis can be subtle at first, and often changes such as resting or sleeping more, slowing down on walks or general grumpiness can be easily put down to 'old age'. Cats can also suffer from arthritis, with many surveys estimating between 60-90% of elderly cats being affected.

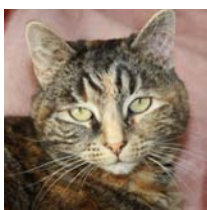


So – if you are worried your pet is showing signs of arthritis, please get in touch! Arthritis is usually diagnosed with a combination of a clinical examination (looking for stiffness, pain and roughness in the joints), plus a history of changes compatible with the disease. X-rays can also be very helpful – confirming the degree of bone changes and allowing assessment of the joints affected.

So what can be done for pets with arthritis? It's important to understand that arthritis cannot be cured, but the measures below aim to improve the lives of arthritic pets.

Weight loss can make a huge difference to many affected pets, as they are often overweight. **Regular gentle exercise** is also important, and it helps if it is consistent (i.e. the same amount of exercise twice daily, every day) whilst physio exercises can aid mobility. **Joint supplements containing glucosamine** may be helpful, but the majority of pets also benefit from **anti-inflammatory pain relief medication**.

Please get in touch if you think your dog or cat may be showing signs of arthritis, and let us help you get the spring back in their steps!



Lump alert!

Lumps and bumps come in a variety of shapes and sizes and can be picked up by regular grooming (also excellent for looking for fleas, ticks and other parasites!). If you notice a skin lump, it's important to get in touch so we can assess it.

Lumps can have several underlying causes including: allergic reactions (such as insect bites), abscesses, hernias (often seen in younger pets) and tumours.

Tumours are understandably the most worrying and are either benign (tend to be slow growing and stay in one place), or malignant (which are often fast growing and can spread).

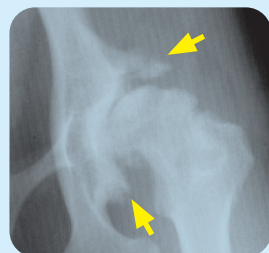
As with many conditions, speed is of the essence and a delay in starting the appropriate treatment can be the difference between a small treatable mass and a much larger one which is harder to deal with.

X-rays and arthritis

Radiography is commonly used to investigate joint problems.



X-ray of a **normal hip joint** – note the perfectly formed "ball and socket" joint of the hip joint.



Arthritic hip joint in a dog with hip dysplasia. Note the very shallow ball and socket joint and the secondary new bone around the joint (arrowed in yellow)



Skin lump on a dog Skin lump on a cat

Lumps may vary considerably in appearance. Some are fairly obvious (such as the photos above), whilst others are much harder to detect.

Autumn hazards!



As we get out and about more in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, it's worth being aware of the range of Autumn hazards faced by our pets. With this in mind, here are a few topical tips:

Pesky parasites: We have covered fleas and ticks elsewhere in this newsletter, but another important parasite to be aware of are **Harvest Mites**, which are a problem in the late-summer



The bright orange mites often cluster together and are commonly found between the toes

and Autumn. These very seasonal parasites are picked up in woodland and long grasses and swarm onto passing pets where they tend to congregate on the ears, eyelids, feet and the underside of the abdomen.



Harvest mite down the microscope

They are identified as tiny bright orange dots adhering tightly to the skin and are usually a cause of great irritation with itchy, crusting lesions developing. So – make sure you regularly check your pet's coat for any signs of parasites and let us advise you on the best treatments for your pet.

Toxins: Around the house and garden, keep a wary eye out for toxins at this time of year. Pets are very attracted to **ethylene glycol**

(**antifreeze**) which is easily spilt when topping up car radiators. It is very sweet tasting and extremely toxic to pets, causing kidney failure and often death.



Any spilt antifreeze is **deadly** to pets

In the garden, try to ensure pets don't eat **fermenting apples** and also **conkers** – both of which can lead to quite severe digestive upsets.



Snails: Also try to stop your dog eating the last of the **slugs and snails** in the garden, since these can spread the lungworm

Angiostrongylus vasorum.

Seasonal Canine Illness is a rare, but serious, condition and is most commonly diagnosed between August and November. The cause is unknown but affected dogs become very poorly with sickness and diarrhoea soon after walking in woodland. Please get in touch at once if your pet develops any symptoms resembling this rare condition.

Finally, enjoy the Autumn and take care!