



# Dacre House Veterinary Clinic

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# NEWS



WINTER 2023

## Practice News

**As the demand for veterinary services continues to grow we are working hard to try to keep waiting times down and ensure there are appointments available. As part of this, we have welcomed three new animal nursing assistants to the team:**

**Ellie** joined us in August having completed two years' of animal management training at Hadlow College. She is confident with all small animal species having her own menagerie at home: three dogs, one cat, eight rabbits and a coup of chickens!

**Izabel** has changed career from primary teaching assistant to working with animals, inspired by her earlier experience of being a meercat keeper at the Hop Farm. Having studied Psychology and Sociology she is particularly interested in the people side of the veterinary and the care of animals especially after surgery.

**Abi** has just joined us from the Big Cat Sanctuary. A lover of cats (and big dogs!), she is looking forward to learning more about veterinary nursing. At home she has a cat and a chameleon.

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**Also, you may have spotted we are doing a bit of building work over in Pembury.**

We are pleased to say that work has finally started on the first phase of our building project which will eventually mean that we will be able to carry out a range of surgical procedures in Pembury as well as in Southborough.

*We'll keep you updated as work progresses.*



## Cold weather aches and pains

Arthritis is a common problem, especially in middle aged to older pets, although sometimes younger animals are affected too.

The joints most susceptible to arthritis are the ones permitting free limb movements – called synovial joints.

There are several causes of arthritis: it commonly occurs as part of the normal ageing process, leading to wear and tear on the joints, but in other cases it may be linked to previous trauma to a particular joint. For some animals, conformational joint issues such as hip or elbow dysplasia result in the joint being abnormally loaded, leading to joint damage and secondary arthritis. Arthritis develops when the articular cartilage becomes pitted and cracked, resulting in exposure of the underlying bone, causing pain and inflammation.

Signs of arthritis often include sleeping more, plus for **dogs**, difficulty in getting up after rest, slowing down on walks and a reluctance to jump into the car.



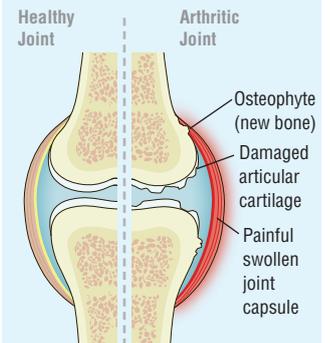
**Cats** may take extra time or effort to jump up onto surfaces, or show signs of toileting issues such as incontinence or missing a litter tray. Some animals may show changes in temperament due to pain.

Arthritis is usually diagnosed on a combination of clinical examination (examining the joints for swelling, thickening, pain and range of movement), plus a history suggestive of changes compatible with the disease. X-rays can also be helpful, confirming the degree of bone changes.

To help your pets with sore joints, especially in the winter, make sure they always sleep on a deep, soft bed and keep the ambient temperatures warm. A key consideration is **weight loss** for any pets carrying excess weight, as this hugely impacts on the joints. Many pets also benefit from **anti-inflammatory medication** to reduce the pain, plus **dietary supplements** are often beneficial as well. Many arthritic pets struggle with long **walks**, so little and often is the key.

So – if you are concerned your pet may be struggling with arthritis, please come and talk to us!

### Understanding arthritis:



**Healthy Joint:** The ends of the bones are covered by smooth articular cartilage and the joints are lubricated by synovial fluid, achieving pain free movement.

**Arthritic Joint:** The protective cartilage is damaged and worn away, resulting in exposure of the underlying bone causing pain and inflammation.

## Winter fleas – are your pets protected?



With the central heating going on, a quick reminder of what else likes the warmth in our homes – fleas! Fleas were once thought of as a problem in warm summer months, however they are now a year-round problem!

Fleas can make their way into our homes in all sorts of ways; on our pets, on us, or just hopping in by themselves. Fleas feed and breed on our pets, with female fleas laying eggs which fall off around your house – often ending up in protected places like under furniture or deep in carpets. Flea eggs can survive for months, waiting to be activated by warm conditions

(as you turn on the central heating!) and the presence of pets spending more time inside. This is why flea infestations can appear to come out of nowhere!

There are a great variety of **veterinary licensed products** on the market including spot-ons, tablets and collars. These are far more effective at rapidly killing fleas than products bought at supermarkets and pet shops. Regular year-round flea treatment is much better than having to deal with a flea infestation which can take months to control! So – prevention is most definitely better than cure! Please let us advise you on the best products for your pets.

Dog photo: Warren Photographie



## Rabbiting on!

Rabbits can be a wonderful addition to the family. However, despite their small size they do need well thought out housing, diets and companionship. Rabbits are a prey species (unlike dogs and cats who are predator species) so sometimes can panic with handling and as a result don't always make the best pets for children.

**Housing:** Rabbits enjoy company and therefore are best housed together in neutered bonded pairs of usually a male and a female. Their housing should support their needs to hop, run and forage. A hutch isn't really enough as they like plenty of room.

**Teeth:** Rabbits have continually growing teeth and without enough fibre to grind the teeth down, can soon find themselves with dental disease.

The key dental problem seen in rabbits is tooth *over-growth* – see photos right. Rabbits have continuously growing teeth – incisors at the front of the mouth and molar teeth at the back of the mouth, growing at a rate of 1-3mm per week! Without enough fibre in their diet, they can get spikes appearing on their cheek teeth, and overgrown front incisors, which can then cause painful ulcers in the mouth.

Their daily diet needs to be very fibrous – so mainly hay, dark leafy vegetables and about an egg cup full of commercial all-in-one rabbit nuggets. Muesli type foods are best avoided, as rabbits tend to pick out the sweeter bits of the mix, resulting in a nutritionally imbalanced diet, which can lead to dental problems.

**Vaccination:** Rabbits, like dogs and cats, can be vaccinated. The two main diseases are Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 1 and 2 (VHD 1 and 2). Both of these can be rapidly fatal. There are vaccines available that give good protection and are recommended for yearly use. These vaccines have been updated to give protection for the new strain, VHD 2. Since myxomatosis can be spread by flies and mosquitoes, it is recommended to have indoor rabbits vaccinated as well.

If you would like further information on caring for your rabbit, feeding, dental health and vaccination, please don't hesitate to contact our helpful team.

### Teeth disorders



Healthy incisor teeth should normally meet – as above



Misaligned and overgrown incisor (front) teeth



## Winter weight alert!

Shorter days, bad weather, and the lure of a cosy sofa all conspire against us and our pets in the winter months, leaving both pets and owners prone to putting on a few unwanted pounds. As with ourselves, weight gain can be subtle and insidious in our pets, and once gained can be hard to shift.

Long term, this can have health risks since carrying excess weight can cause or worsen a range of conditions including skin, heart, respiratory (especially in shorter nose breeds) and joint disease. Your pet may also be more prone to develop problems such as diabetes, pancreatitis and high blood pressure.

So – now is the perfect time to assess your pet's weight! Dogs should have a visible 'waist line', with ribs that can be felt on palpation. By contrast, if you can pinch an inch or more, and if your pet's tummy sags down, then a diet is probably in order. Cats should have a tucked up tummy rather than a swinging 'mouse pouch'. We are here to help, can weigh your pet and can advise you on their ideal weight, plus offer regular weight checks at the surgery.

Special diets and feeders, advice on exercise, treats, and calorie management all have their part to play and will give you the best chance to get your pet's weight back under control. The good news is that as your pet loses weight, the benefits of increased healthiness and vitality are usually seen quite quickly. So, if your pet has gained weight, or seems to have slowed down, then why not give us a call!



## Winter worries!

With the onset of colder wintry weather, we take a seasonal look at some top tips to keep your pets fit and well at this time of year.

**Winter walks:** With the colder, wetter and darker days to come, it's still essential to make sure your pets get adequate exercise. Dogs will benefit from a warm waterproof coat for walks, especially dogs who are older and possibly arthritic. High-vis coats for owners and dogs is a good idea with the darker nights.

**Outdoor pets:** Pet rabbits and guinea pigs can also be prone to the cold with bad weather. Ensure there



is plenty of warm bedding available in a dry and draft free 'bedroom area'. Sometimes covering over an outside hutch can improve insulation. Consider a wrapped warm water bottle for the bedroom

area so they have the option to snuggle against it. Rabbits would normally live in a burrow which stays around 10°C, so rabbits and guinea pigs are ideally brought into a heated garage or shed, or moved inside. Check your small furrries at least once a day to make sure they are bright, eating and well. If you have a rabbit or guinea pig who lives alone, now is the ideal time to think about getting a friend of the same species so they have someone to cuddle up with!

**Festive alert:** With Christmas on the horizon – it's the time of year for indulgence and perhaps different foods in the house to normal. A reminder that chocolate, grapes, raisins, onions and the sweetener xylitol are poisonous; these are often in abundance in festive foods. Please ensure they are kept safely away from your pets – it's surprising how many dogs can sniff out delicious treats and then help themselves! Flowers like Lillies are especially toxic for cats. Even the seasonal favourite, the Poinsettia, can cause irritation if eaten.

Tinsel, food scraps, bones or even turkey string can all be hazardous. Bones can get stuck. String and tinsel can cause a linear foreign body which can be very serious and life threatening.

It is worth being mindful of how festive items and unwanted food are disposed of, since you don't realise how much of the world is edible until viewed through the eyes of a Labrador! A cautionary thought!

So – if you would like any further information on caring for your pets in the colder weather and festive season – we are here to help, please don't hesitate to ask a member of our practice team.

