



THE VET REPORT
- 2019 -

PET COMMUNICATION

How much do our pets really understand?

PETS AND DEPRESSION

How do our pets make us feel?

MAKE YOUR HOUSE A HOME

Providing pets with the perfect place

SAFE TRIPS HOME AND ABROAD

Travelling with your pet

PET BLOOD BANK

What it is and why it matters

Exploring the power of the human–animal bond
Issue 5 - February 2019



Vets4Pets
Putting your pet first

Welcome

Here at Vets4Pets we hold the relationship between pets and their owners at the forefront of everything that we do. This relationship is known as the human-animal bond and is a fundamental part of pet ownership, as well as the work that happens in veterinary practices across the country every day.



At Vets4Pets we know that pets are more than just family members. From joy-filled Labradors to purring Persians, they are companions, councillors, fitness trainers, comforters and best friends. The human-animal bond encapsulates the special place our pets have in our lives, strengthens the wellbeing of both pets and people, and underpins everything we value and love about our animal friends. For some, it can even be life-saving.

The Vet Report is a chance to celebrate this bond, investigating how we support our pets, and how they support us in turn. We look at how you can make your pets happy, the impact they have on you, and how you can work together to understand each other.

We hope you enjoy reading the Vet Report as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Best wishes,

Huw Stacey

Director of Clinical Services
Vets4Pets

For more information on giving our pets the very best pet care, visit our website vets4pets.com



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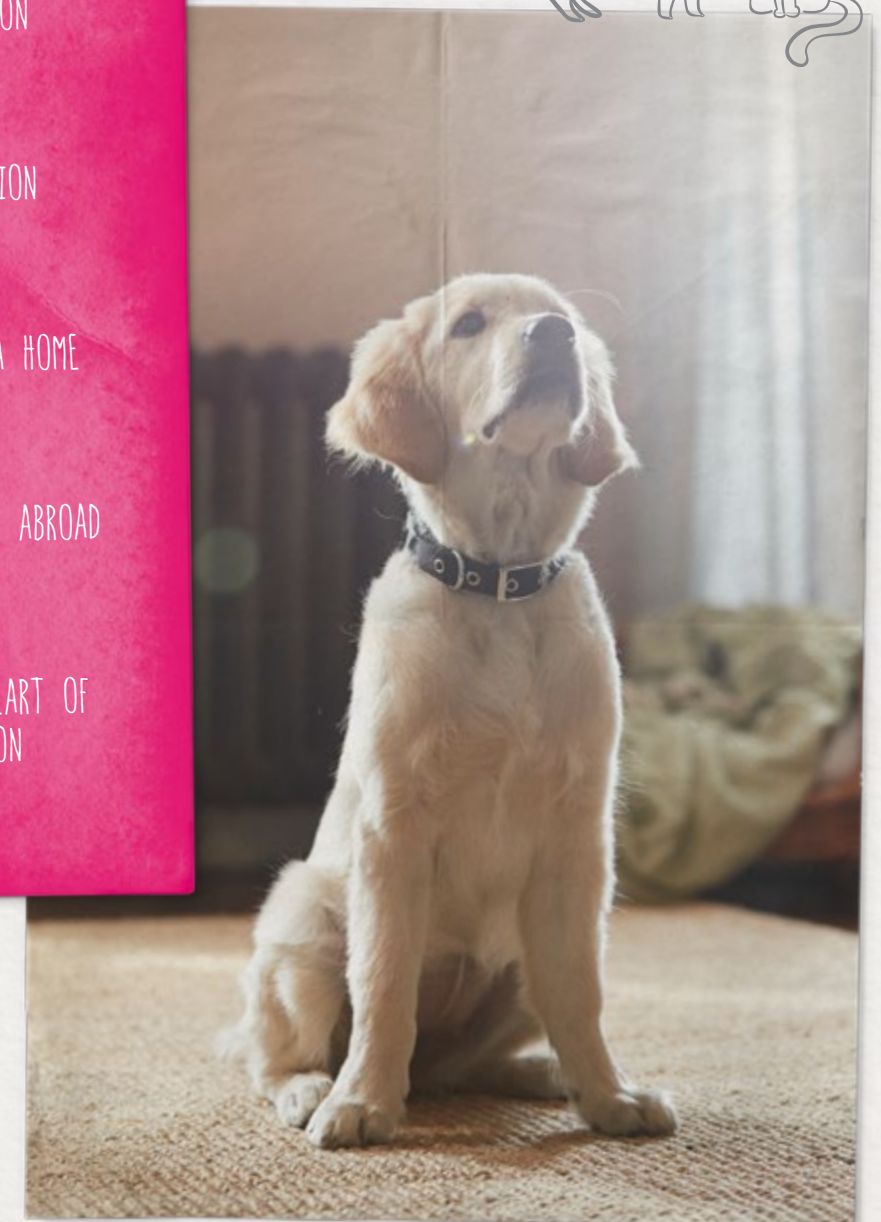
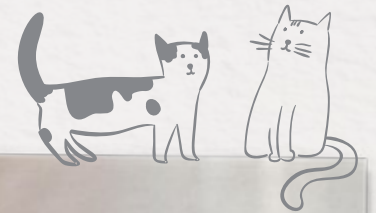
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" WE MAY HAVE PETS, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, THEY ARE THE MASTERS "

- DONALD L HICKS



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Pet Communication

How do our pets talk to us?

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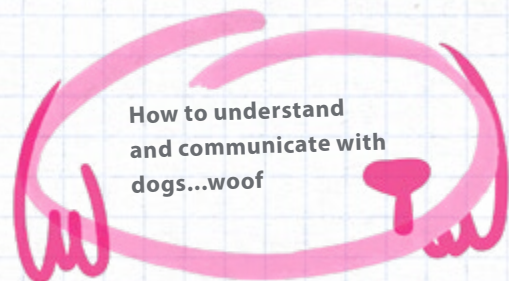


Talking to our pets is part of everyday life, from telling them it's time for 'walkies!' to griping to your cat about your bad day at work.

We talk with our voices, with our bodies and even with smells. Communicating with our pets is so commonplace that we rarely stop to appreciate just how amazing it is that two completely different species can have any mutual understanding at all!

But how much do our pets really understand? And what are they saying back?

LEARNING TO 'SPEAK DOG'



How to understand and communicate with dogs...woof

Dogs are experts in the world of non-verbal communications; body language is their first language and their primary method of expressing themselves. As humans, our talents are reversed. We are verbal masters, using body language to reinforce our messages. This means our first step to understanding the world of canine communication is to try and understand what they are telling us, not with their voice, but with their facial expressions, posture, tail, ears and even their fur!

Most of us are familiar with the extremes of canine body language – snarling when angry, for example - but the more subtle messages can often be missed or misinterpreted. This can be tiny details such as the position of the eyes, or the raising of a paw. It is also important to look at a dog's body language in context. Just like us, the situation is important. A person folding their arms could be interpreted as defensive body language, but it could also be due to the room being cold!

The body language used by dogs can be split into five broad categories; fear, arousal, anxiety, aggression and relaxation.



FEAR

Relaxation is usually easy to spot, as relaxed dogs are relaxed all over! They hold their mouth open slightly, often with their tongue out, have wagging tails, loose bodies and both their eyes and ears are soft.



AROUSAL

Arousal or excitement is associated with a dog who is more engaged with their situation. Often this is due to something good going on, such as the appearance of a favourite toy, but arousal can also be due to unfavourable events. Common arousal signs include jumping up, mouthing, lunging, erect ears and stiff tail wagging. You may also hear some barking!



ANXIETY

You are likely to see the same arousal behaviour no matter the cause, so how can you tell if your dog is happy or unhappy when they are showing these signs? It is important first and foremost to look at the circumstances. If you've just come home from work and greeted your dog, he's probably very happy! Meeting a new dog at the park however might make your dog unsure, and you may see extra cues which indicate they are also feeling anxious or even aggressive or fearful.



AGGRESSION



RELAXATION

Just like us, dogs can experience more than one emotion at once, and getting used to interpreting a mixture of signs will help you pick out your dog's more complex feelings.



An important part of teaching canine communication is helping children learn how to approach dogs safely. Ask their owner for permission first, allow the dog to sniff your hand and then try a short stroke on the chest or shoulders if the dog appears relaxed and happy. Dogs often don't like hugs, so stick with a nice stroke instead!

Looking out for signals that your dog may be experiencing more negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, or aggression is important. Often dogs may start with just mild anxiety, which can be difficult to spot. As anxiety increases this may develop into more obvious fear signs and increase to aggression if the negative stimulus doesn't go away. This exacerbation of emotion is known as the 'ladder of aggression', and the lower down the ladder you can identify that your dog is struggling or worried, the sooner you can intervene. Many dogs who bite 'out of the blue' have actually been displaying anxiety or fear signs in the run up that have been missed by the people around them.

THE LADDER OF CANINE AGGRESSION

Dogs communicate their discomfort with a situation and a desire to end interaction using visual cues.





I AM A GOOD BOY!



LEARNING TO 'SPEAK HUMAN'

We can learn to spot dogs' body language cues, but how much do our dogs understand us?

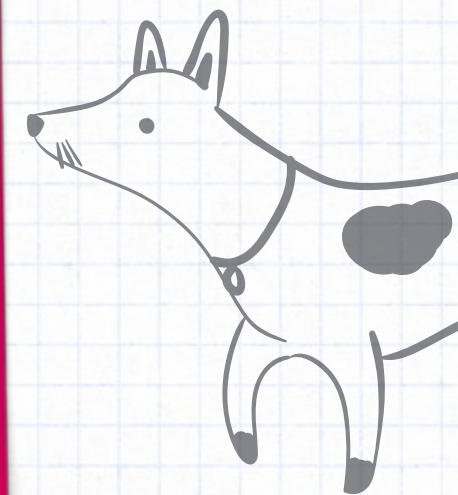
Despite verbal communication being a second language to dogs, they can recognise a number of human sounds, which helps them follow what we're saying. They are especially good at hard consonants – sounds like 'it' and 'cuh'. While the simple fact they can comprehend words is amazing, dogs aren't adept at putting language together. Your dog may understand 'lie down' and 'outside', but asking your dog to 'lie down outside' will be too much to process, unless you have practiced that command specifically. For assistance in understanding their human friends, dogs often rely on tone of voice as a guide for behaviour. **Speaking in a happy tone of voice versus a morose one will likely alter your dog's behaviour, regardless of what you are saying!**

Although complex vocabulary might be too much for your average pooch, understanding our body language is something our companion dogs are very good at. This goes a long way to making it seem like they understand our every word! Most owners will tell

you that their dog always knows if they feel sad or down, or will fetch a specific item when they gesture for it. Interestingly, evidence suggests that domestication has increased the ability of our dogs to understand us. Wolves, raised like domestic dogs, never learn the tricks our dogs can manage, such as following a pointing finger?.



DID YOU KNOW THE 'WORLD'S SMARTEST DOG', A BORDER COLLIE CALLED CHASER, KNEW THE NAMES OF 1,022 OBJECTS!'



DID YOU KNOW DOGS STEAL FOOD MORE OFTEN WHEN THEIR OWNER'S EYES ARE CLOSED?? CLEVER CLOGS!



MISCOMMUNICATION

Many of the problems or conflicts between man and dog stem from simple miscommunication. Two of the most commonly misinterpreted elements of dog body language are a wagging tail and a 'grin' or 'smile'.

A wagging tail is an indication of an aroused or excited state of mind. A madly wagging tail held at middle height is likely an expression of joy and happiness, but dogs can also wag their tail when they are alert for other reasons. Checking to see if the rest of their body is relaxed or tense, taking into account their surroundings, and keeping an eye out for any behavioural signs from the 'ladder of aggression' are good ways to see how your dog is really feeling.

'Grinning' dogs often feature in social media, and are also easy to interpret as happy, as we simply apply human meaning to their expression. Actually, dogs who are showing the 'grin' or 'smile' are displaying very submissive behaviour, known as appeasement. Appeasement behaviours are used to calm a situation down, and to make a dog look non-threatening. This can be in response to feeling uncomfortable or anxious, so if you see this, have a look at the situation and for other body language cues. The dog may not be that happy at all!



CONCLUSION

The connection we have with dogs is truly astonishing. After our 30,000 years of shared history⁴, man and man's best friend can understand an incredible amount of what each other are saying. We still have a way to go though, and taking time to learn the language of our dogs is the best way to make sure your furriest family member gets their voice heard too.

CATS

While our close relationship with dogs has fundamentally changed their ability to communicate with us, our relationship with cats has had rather less of an impact. Originally domesticated 9000 years ago in order to help control vermin, we required very little change from our cats – after all, catching mice and rats is one of the things they do best⁵! This meant that cats have retained many of their ancestral characteristics, despite living and working alongside humans. Our companion cats of today still have keen hunting prowess, highly attuned senses, strong fight or flight instincts and complex social needs⁶.

In our modern age it can be difficult to match our ways of living and communicating with the innate needs of our cats. Learning to understand what our cats are trying to tell us is an important part of helping our cats settle in very human surroundings, and become fulfilled and contented family pets.



HOW DO CATS COMMUNICATE?

Our cats perceive much more of the world around them than we do. Their ears can move to help locate sounds, and they can hear at frequencies we cannot. Their eyes are very sensitive, especially to fast movement, and they also have a heightened sense of smell.

As cats are so attuned to their surroundings, feline communication can appear very subtle. This means that small changes in your cat can be indicative of large changes in emotional state. Cats express themselves using mainly body language, facial expression, touch and smell. While we can learn to spot some key facial and body positions, we cannot (perhaps thankfully) smell as well as they can. Although we cannot pick up many of our cat's scent signals directly, appreciating the significance of scent to your cat is important for understanding how your cat perceives the world.

So do our cats communicate much with us directly? Or are we just left to interpret their moods? Interestingly, a meow is not a very common method of communication for adult cats. They do not routinely meow at each other, and mainly reserve this sound for 'talking' to humans. This shows that while much of their communication is passive, they do make an active effort to engage with their owners. Other sounds are used to communicate both with us and other cats, including growls, chirps, hisses and purrs. A purr has been likened to a human smile – while it is most commonly used as an expression of happiness, it can also be used when nervous, to self-soothe and even to soothe others.



DOMESTIC CATS CAN KEEP UP A CONSTANT PURR WHILE SOME BIG CATS, LIKE LIONS AND TIGERS, CAN ONLY PURR WHILE BREATHING OUT!



DID YOU KNOW CATS HAVE 5-10 TIMES MORE TISSUE INVOLVED IN SMELL THAN HUMANS?!

FELINE BODY LANGUAGE

Reading your cat's body language can give you a good insight into how they are feeling in the moment. Understanding these signs, especially those displaying anxiety or annoyance, can help prevent misunderstandings between cats and people. As well as reducing the risk of bites and scratches, this can also help you create a home environment that suits your cat. Cats can be very sensitive and are prone to chronic stress in environments that are not suitable, which can lead to health conditions such as cystitis, a painful inflammation of the bladder.

For more information on keeping your cat happy, have a look at what you need at www.vets4pets.com/happycats

Facial signals can be one of the first indicators if your cat has a change in mood. While cats have relatively immobile faces compared to some other species, ear position, eyes, whiskers and pupil size can be strong indicators of emotional state. Relaxed ears and whiskers generally mean a relaxed cat, while ears forward and whiskers outward facing and erect are signs your cat is alert. Flattened ears indicate a much more defensive attitude so have a look around and see what might be upsetting them; this is most commonly seen with other cats. If those ears are swivelled outwards, your cat is readying for aggressive action. Be careful if you see this – your next warning may not be a visual one! Pupil size usually correlates with the intensity of the situation; thin pupils are more likely in relaxed cats, as are slow blinks, winking, and half-closed eyes. More aroused cats, either through fear, anger or excitement, will be more likely to fix a non-blinking stare and may have more dilated pupils. Don't forget to take into account the situation though – just like us, their pupils will be bigger in lower light.

GOOD TO REMEMBER



Your cat's tail is also a very visible indicator of how your cat is feeling. A tail held up vertically, especially when hooked over at the end, is a friendly tail, but be careful if you see your cat's tail waving.

Unlike dogs, a waving tail is usually a sign your cat is agitated or annoyed. A very upset cat may lash their tail from side to side or puff up the fur on their tail and spine to make themselves look bigger. Threatened cats may also arch their back or hunch down, thumping their tail, both of which indicate that they are feeling defensive.

WATCH OUT FOR THIS



WHILE YOUR CAT URINATING OR DEFECATING IN THE WRONG PLACE CAN BE A WAY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES, IT CAN ALSO OCCUR DUE TO HEALTH CONDITIONS LIKE ARTHRITIS, BLADDER INFLAMMATION, AND FELINE DEMENTIA.

HAVE A CHAT TO YOUR VET IF YOUR CAT STARTS TOILETING IN THE WRONG PLACE TO GET THEM CHECKED OUT NOSE TO TAIL!

BEYOND BODY LANGUAGE

While body language can give you a snapshot impression of your cat's current mood, their general behaviour can give a more comprehensive idea of how they are feeling. Scent marking, of both places and trusted others, is an important way for cats to express themselves. Scent can be used to communicate with other cats remotely, mark territory, signal fertility and identify safe areas. This marking comes in several forms, and reading these behaviours can help you understand your cat, even if you can't always pick up on the smells themselves!

You may see your cat rubbing their face against you – did you know this is more than just a sign of affection? You are actually being marked as one of the family! Your cat has scent glands here that release feline facial pheromone, associated with feelings of safety and comfort. If your cat is feeling anxious you may see this behaviour increase as they reinforce their relationships.

Scents are also used on places that are trusted. Glands between the toes release recognisable secretions, allowing cats to mark out routes within their territory by scratching on posts, trees or sofas! 'Kneading' behaviour on soft furnishings, or on you, also releases this pheromone. Stronger marks at the boundaries of your cat's territory, warning others cats to 'Get lost!', may be placed using urine spray and faeces. The more worried a cat is about the threat of other cats, the stronger these signals will be. Urine spraying in the house can be the act of a cat who feels threatened and wants to say, in no uncertain terms, 'This space is mine'!

While we can't smell pheromones, we can still watch for marking behaviours. While some marking is normal, increased marking can indicate anxiety, and more extreme behaviour such as house soiling often correlate with high stress levels in your cat. Other stress signs in cats can include hiding away, over-grooming the fur on their belly, changes in personality, and changes in eating habits. Picking up on these communications gives you the opportunity to try and work out what is upsetting them – **speaking to your vet for advice can really help, and will also help rule out any medical problems.**



YOU MAY SEE YOUR CAT RUBBING THEIR FACE AGAINST YOU – DID YOU KNOW THIS IS MORE THAN JUST A SIGN OF AFFECTION? YOU ARE ACTUALLY BEING MARKED AS ONE OF THE FAMILY!



CONCLUSION

While cats may be more enigmatic than dogs they still communicate with us all the time, through the way they behave with us and around us. Much of this is clear, such as the loud morning 'hungry' meow, or the satisfied curling up on your knee, but some signs are less obvious. Living with humans and other pets can be a source of anxiety for cats, and one of the most powerful ways we can use our understanding of cats is to work with them to create a calm, safe home environment.

ALEX THE PARROT

Parrots are amazing chatterboxes and the ability of some parrots to mimic human speech is well known. But did you know that parrots can do more than just repeat words?

The most famously studied parrot in history was Alex, who proved that African Grey parrots can also learn to understand the words they are saying! Alex knew over 100 words, could count, understood 'bigger' and 'smaller', and is the only recorded non-human in history to ask a question. When looking at himself in the mirror he asked 'What colour?' something not even primates taught sign language have achieved. Before his passing in 2007 his last words were "You be good, see you tomorrow. I love you". What an amazing bird!^{8,9}

PEG

WHAT COLOUR?

COME HERE

SMALLER...

BIGGER...

GREEN

KEY

WANT CORK

WATER

BLUE

PAPER

THREE CORNER

WOOD

NO



"YOU BE GOOD"

"SEE YOU TOMORROW"

"I LOVE YOU"

RABBITS

Rabbits may be quiet, but don't let that fool you into thinking they can't express themselves! Rabbits use body language and vocalisations to let you, and other rabbits, know how they are feeling.

Happy rabbits may do a joyous leap into the air, known as a 'binky', which serves no other purpose than to show they are feeling great!

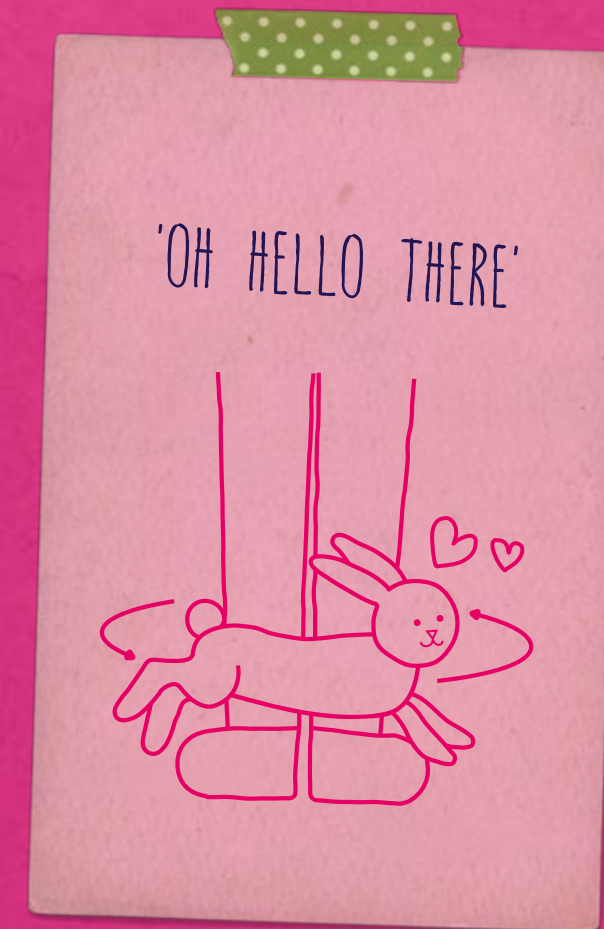
They can lick their owner to show acceptance and friendship, and may even make a 'purring' noise by softly grinding their teeth. Be careful with this final one though. A loud grinding of the teeth is an indicator of pain and means a trip to the vets as soon as possible!

WATCH OUT FOR THIS



NOT A HAPPY BUNNY

'Thumping', when rabbits stomp on the ground with a hind leg, is the opposite of a binky and is an expression of nerves or annoyance. This can be accompanied by a squeal, grunt or growl. Frightened rabbits may go flat to the ground and are more likely to let out a sound akin to a scream, which can be also heard when rabbits are in pain.



Finally, keep an eye out for your rabbit circling you. Especially if they are making quiet noises too, your rabbit may be suggesting a date night! If this is the case, it might be time to think about getting bunny neutered.

Pets and depression?



Everyone knows spending time with your pet makes you feel happy! The special relationship between us and our pets provides a bond that is essential to the health and wellbeing of both us and them. Pets provide comfort when we're down, are constant companions, help us get fit, and can even be good for our mental health!

The positive effect of pets has been shown to have an effect not just in promoting good mental health, but in helping us when our mental health is struggling. Sadly, depression is the most prevalent human mental health issue worldwide¹. In one study nearly 20% of people in the UK showed signs of depression or anxiety².

As scientists learn more about the effect our pets have on how we feel and act, we ask just how do our furred and feathered friends support our mental health? And should we have 'pets on prescription'?

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a disorder associated with mood, causing feelings of sadness or hopelessness that can last for long periods of time. Having clinical depression may have a significant impact on your life, affecting all aspects of your day including relationships, work, social life and education. Symptoms can be mild, moderate or severe, and are thought to affect over 300 million people worldwide³.

Researchers don't know why some people will develop depression but environmental factors such as stress and loneliness have been identified as triggers. There is also a debate about the role of imbalances or changes in certain chemicals within the brain, although an actual chemical cause has not been identified.

We do know that the chemicals that make it to the brain have an effect on neurones – the cells that make up the brain. They can affect how messages are transmitted and processed within the brain, which is then seen as changes in

mood and behaviour. Scientists agree that changing the levels of some chemicals within the body can have a positive effect on depression. This includes increasing amounts of 'feel-good' chemicals such as oxytocin and dopamine, as well as reducing stress-related hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline.

While depression can look different in different sufferers, and may have a range of triggers, finding ways to positively impact brain biochemistry is often a fundamental part of managing the diagnosis. Scientific research on the impact of the human-animal bond focuses on the impact of animals on mood. The simple fact that our pets make us feel good can boost our 'happy' chemical messengers – dopamine and oxytocin – meaning that spending time with your pets might even beat an apple a day when it comes to keeping the doctor away!

DID YOU KNOW THAT DOGS HAVE THE 'FEEL-GOOD' HORMONE OXYTOCIN TOO? IN FACT, A STUDY HAS SHOWN THEIR OXYTOCIN LEVELS RISE WHEN BEING STROKED BY THEIR OWNER!⁴

HOW DO PETS MAKE US FEEL?



IN THE 1830'S THE BRITISH CHARITY COMMISSION SUGGESTED ASYLUMS SHOULD HAVE SHEEP, HARES OR MONKEYS TO HELP PEOPLE STAYING THERE!⁶

We know that as well as physical changes within the brain, the environment plays a huge role in the development of depression.

'Environment' includes everything around you, including if you do or don't have a pet. How you feel is directly influenced by your environment, and negative states such as loneliness and stress affect the population in high numbers. A 2018 study showed nearly three quarters of the UK population have felt so stressed in the last year that they felt overwhelmed or unable to cope and The Office of National Statistics estimates approximately one in twenty people feel lonely often or always^{3,5}.

Sadly, these negative emotional states such as stress and loneliness have been linked to an increasing risk for depression. In one report over half of adults who felt stressed also reported feeling depressed⁵.

Pets have long been seen as being a part of the solution to depression, especially in cases that stem from stress or loneliness. In fact, using dogs to help mental wellbeing was first reported in 1699⁶! In recent times, many more studies have been done to show the positive effect of pets.

Investigations show 56% of people believe that having a pet relieves stress and anxiety, and that over 80% of millennials feel less anxious after spending time with a kitten or puppy⁷. While pet care can be a source of worry for some, and so should be considered on an individual basis, for many the company of pets is soothing and a positive part of working to reduce stress and improve quality of life.

Although the root causes of stress and anxiety can be very varied, the role of pets to improve happiness and reduce the risk of depression developing can usually be seen irrespective of cause. An example of this is depression associated with diagnosis of an illness. This can be an especially difficult time which can increase the risk of developing depression due to stress. Several studies looking at health problems that may trigger depression, such as heart disease or AIDS, have shown that patients with pets are less likely to suffer from depression than their counterparts^{8,9}.

For people who are struggling with loneliness, another trigger for depression, pets can be a true lifeline - pet owners are 36% less likely to be lonely than those that don't have a pet¹¹. While loneliness can be most visible in the elderly (sadly, 11% of elderly people have contact with friends and family less than once a month¹²), it's important to realise that loneliness can affect all age groups. In fact, in a 2018 survey by the

BBC, it was found that 18-24 year olds reported the highest levels of loneliness, perhaps in part to this often being a time of transition, or the influence of social media¹³. Pet ownership can make huge differences to people in isolated circumstances; in one study participants reported less loneliness after one-on-one time with a dog than they did after spending time with other people¹⁴!



NEARLY HALF OF OLDER PEOPLE SAY THAT TELEVISION OR PETS ARE THEIR MAIN FORM OF COMPANY¹⁰.

SO WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING?

Pets make us feel happy, loved, stimulated and motivated. They get us out of bed in the morning, shower us with unabashed affection and make us smile. We know this makes us feel good, but how do these feelings invoked by a pet, and the chemicals that trigger them, help fight against depression?

Pets affect how we feel in a range of ways. First and foremost, the bond we form with our pets promotes positive emotions. The unconditional love shown by many pets promotes self-worth and self-esteem, boosts confidence and reduces loneliness. Feeling bonded in this way promotes the production of oxytocin – helping us feel relaxed and happy. Just being around our pets is enough to give us an oxytocin boost, acting as a pick-me-up. **Many pet owners will attest to the soothing nature of spending time with your pets after a stressful day, as well as the rush of affection that follows an enthusiastic greeting!** When asked, almost a third of millennials said that they decided to get a pet in attempt to improve their mental health and wellbeing⁷. The value of pets for mental wellbeing may be especially true for those people living alone, for whom having a pet may be an important part of preventing loneliness as well as promoting happiness¹⁵.

Being loved by your pet is wonderful, and can be hugely important during depression. For some sufferers of depression, it can be difficult to find the energy or will to go out. Spending time and energy getting social contact, love and feelings of self-worth from other members of the community can be overwhelming. For those who may struggle with human contact, human-animal relationships are simple and non-judgemental, and are a great way to receive love and affection in a safe environment.

Our pets, as well as promoting good feelings, can also help prevent or reduce the incidence of negative emotions like stress. Even just stroking your pet can reduce your blood pressure and heart rate, including when you are in a stressful situation¹⁶. Simple!

Finally, pets can also distract from feelings like panic attacks or suicidal thoughts, which can occur in people with depression. Helping care for an animal can interrupt negative trains of thought, and help people restore less harmful thinking. Unsurprisingly, cuddles or play with your pet is a great way to help move away from a crisis emotional state, although anyone having suicidal thoughts or struggling with their emotions should always get in contact with family, friends or helpline support*.

***If you are experiencing negative feelings, including depression, anxiety, loneliness and suicidal thoughts, and need someone to talk to, the Samaritans have a 24 hour contact line. Phone for free on 116 123.**



DID YOU KNOW OXYTOCIN IS SOMETIMES CALLED THE 'LOVE' OR 'CUDDLE' HORMONE!

IN ONE STUDY, PEOPLE PUT IN A STRESSFUL SITUATION WERE CALMER WHEN THEY WERE WITH THEIR PET CAT OR DOG THAN THEY WERE WITH THEIR SPOUSE!¹⁷

OUT AND ABOUT

As well as directly impacting mental health, by providing companionship and focus, and helping boost oxytocin

through affection and bonding, pets also help support people with depression in other ways. Depending on your pet-type, ownership may involve getting out and about. Many pets, especially dogs, encourage social activity and lead to an increase in exercise and time spent out of the house.

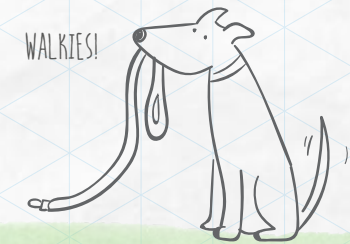
Social activity is an important part of our routines, and although people need this contact in different amounts, we are a naturally social species and suffer in true isolation. Having a pet can increase the opportunities for social contact with other people in the wider community, especially if your pet needs exercising. One study showed that walking with a dog rather than alone can increase the number of social interactions while you are out by threefold, especially increasing chance chats or interactions with strangers¹⁸.

This effect is also seen with service dogs, in some cases assisted by the dogs helping normalise the feelings of their owners, and improving confidence out and about. While having a tenth person coo over your cockerpoo puppy may feel tiresome, it's actually playing an important role in keeping us stimulated and interactive!

Walking also doesn't have to be done solo. Another positive effect of pets is seen when family or friends walk together. Bonding over an evening stroll can solidify relationships, both between people and between pets.



A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION



Getting out and exercising does more for you than just giving you an opportunity to meet new friends - dog owners are on average 12% more active than counterparts who don't have a dog¹⁹. This exercise boost is seen across the age brackets. Dog owners over 65 have been recorded to undertake the same activity levels of those ten years younger, and with this increase in exercise comes a boost for mental health²⁰.

This boost is even seen in serious depression. Walking your dog may produce substantial improvement in mood in patients with major depressive disorders in a short time and in one study, people with clinical depression stated they found exercise was actually the most therapeutic antidepressant^{21,22}. Long term exercise, even simple, regular dog walking, has been shown to normalise levels of stress response chemicals such as cortisol, and increase mood-boosting endorphins²³. Bursts of exercise may also spur serotonin production, a neurotransmitter that helps regulate mood²⁴.

Although a healthy lifestyle can be achieved without a pet, having a responsibility to walk a dog every day is a great motivator to keep fit! Being healthy means you are also less likely to develop some of the diseases which can contribute to a person developing depression. In fact, studies have shown that people who keep a pet are healthier on average²⁵. Keeping your body fit supports mental health, and the daily activity provided by pet ownership can promote long-term healthy lifestyle choices.



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GETTING THE RIGHT PET

It may seem that the health advantages discussed are more relevant to dogs than to other species, but it's important to note that dogs aren't a suitable pet for everyone. Lifestyle, income, and personal preferences may all mean that another type of pet is more suitable. Although dogs, with their regular need for exercise, do seem to have more benefits than other pets, caring for any pet has benefits for our mental health.

Cats, despite being popular pets (we have eight million of them here in the UK!), also receive less press surrounding mental health benefits and have fewer positive studies. However, anecdotally, owning a cat can be hugely beneficial for people suffering from depression, stress or loneliness. In a survey, 87% of people who owned a cat felt it had a positive impact on their wellbeing and a third of respondents described stroking a cat as a calming and helpful activity²⁷. The rather more independent nature of cats, however, means that many of our feline friends will only interact on their terms and may not always be as reliable a companion as some other pets!

Dogs are still the most commonly studied, due to their generally affable nature, huge capacity for affection, and lifestyle impact. Interestingly, not all dogs are created equal. While

breed certainly does not dictate the nature of an individual dog, some breeds receive more negative press and these breeds, such as Rottweilers, are less likely to open the doors for social engagements. This means they might not be as beneficial for those for whom casual conversation helps with depression. Breeds that are generally regarded as having softer natures, such as Labradors, or younger dogs, often draw more positive attention²⁸. Getting the right size and temperament dog for you, however, is the most important point, as having a dog that doesn't fit into your life well can be a source of worry and frustration, and may exacerbate any underlying mental health issues rather than support recovery.

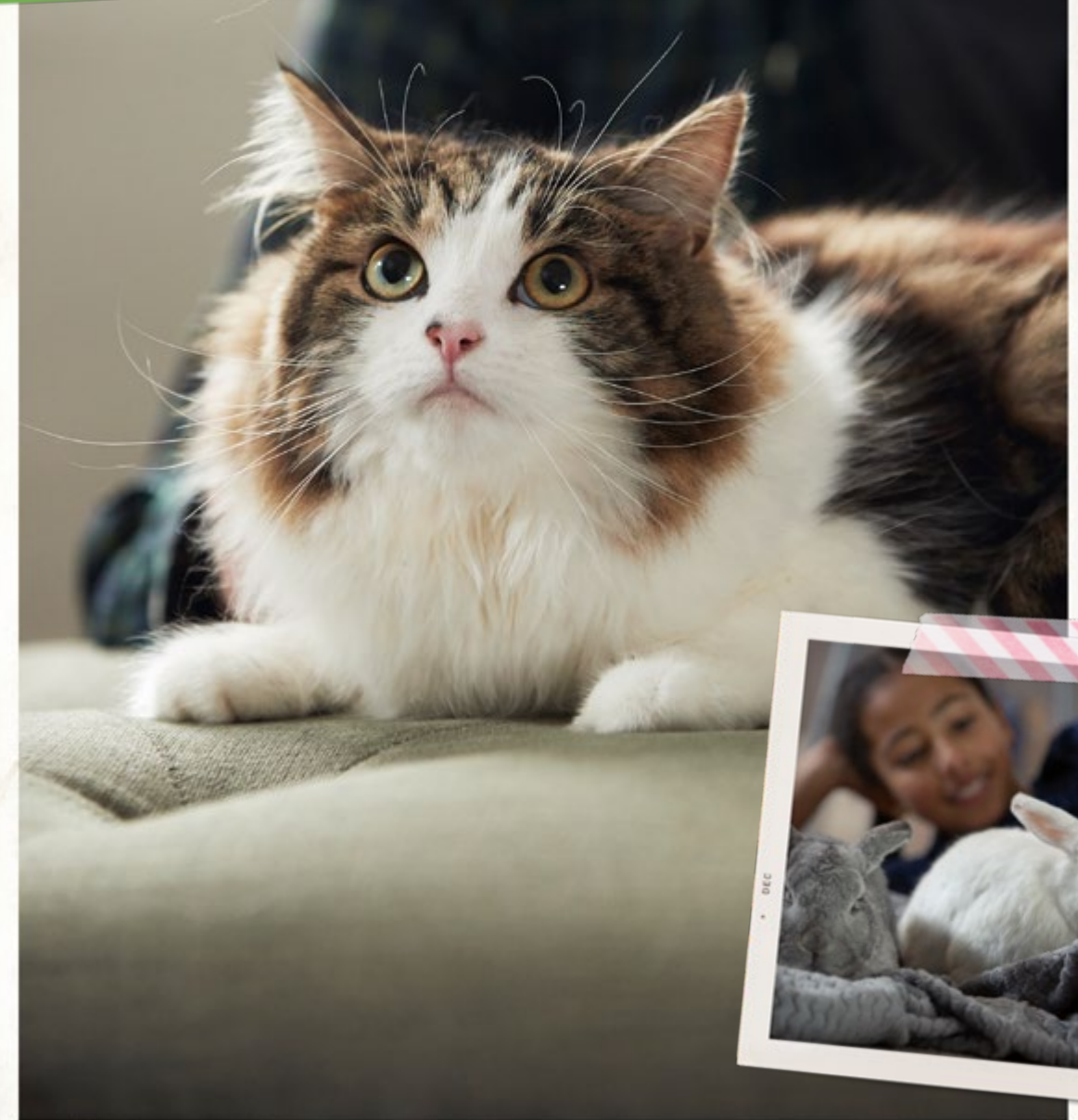
In truth, any pet can trigger positive emotions, help engage their owner and invoke communication. It all depends on which pet is right for you. One study has even proven that holding a turtle will increase the number of people who stop and talk to you!²⁹

THIS ISN'T NEW NEWS!

Florence Nightingale, in 1880, described in 'Notes on Nursing' the benefits of confined patients having a bird, and the 'social lubrication' effect seen by older people after acquiring a pet budgerigar has also been documented²⁶.

IF YOU AREN'T SURE WHAT TYPE OF PET MIGHT SUIT YOU, HAVE A LOOK AT THE HELPFUL TOOL AT...

www.vets4pets.com/choosingapet



CASE STUDY

CINNAMON TRUST



The importance of pets to those who are lonely or struggling is at the heart of everything the Cinnamon Trust does. Founded in 1985, the Cinnamon Trust is a charity dedicated to helping the elderly or terminally ill and their pets. They do this by providing practical help such as dog walking, organising fostering services when owners have hospital stays, and providing long term care for pets whose owners have died or had to move into residential care where pets are not allowed.

Gill Cairns from Somerset has experienced the support of the Cinnamon Trust first hand. Gill lives alone, and has a disability that means it would be impossible for her to care for a dog on her own. She says having the company of a dog is "wonderful", and credits Cinnamon Trust volunteers Anne and Lisa with making it possible for her to share her life with her eleven year old rescue Jack Russell terrier Belle. Anne helped Gill with adopting Belle and now walks her three times a week, while Lisa braves the nights after work, even in the depths of winter!

When asked about her Cinnamon Trust volunteers Gill says Belle "adores them both", and manages to wag the back half of her body as well as her tail in greeting! As well as being great support for Belle, Gill says the volunteers are now good friends, and Anne and Gill often have a cup of tea after Belle's walk. "I'd like to thank the Cinnamon Trust on behalf of Belle and myself", Gill says, "for making it possible for me to have the companionship of a dog."



IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THE CINNAMON TRUST, OR TO FIND OUT MORE, PLEASE VISIT THEIR WEBSITE AT

WWW.CINNAMON.ORG.UK

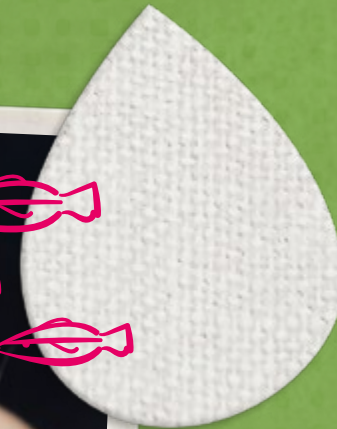
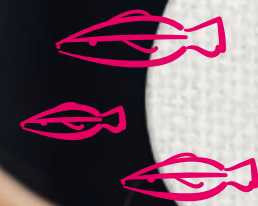


CONCLUSION

Pets are important to us at all points in our lives, but never more so than when we are struggling. Our pets give us purpose, focus, and help us to love in a safe, unguarded and judgement-free way. They help us interact with our fellow people too; both those we already know, and new communities too. By stimulating us and helping us feel good they boost our mood, make us smile, and can even help us when we're unwell.

Pets on prescription? It's too individual to say, but we can be sure that for those who need it, spending time with your pets can be some of the best medicine around.

Make your house a home



“Home is where the heart is” is a familiar phrase. The word ‘home’ conjures feelings of safety, warmth and comfort. We spend a lot of time there, so it’s a space designed to help us feel content and happy.

Our pets need homes too. This means more than just a roof over their heads! Our pets need environments that are designed and maintained to suit them physically, emotionally and behaviourally. We understand a lot more about the living requirements of our pets now than we did in the past. Thankfully, this means that providing our pets with the perfect place to call home is easier than ever before.



RABBITS



ONE OF THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD PET SPECIES IS THE HUMBLE RABBIT. OFTEN SEEN AS A "FIRST" OR "EASY" PET, RABBITS ARE ACTUALLY AS MUCH OF A COMMITMENT AS A CAT, IF NOT MORE!



Rabbits can live for over ten years, are intelligent, sociable, and have demanding requirements. Sadly, chronic underestimation of the needs of rabbits has led to many rabbits not being looked after appropriately.

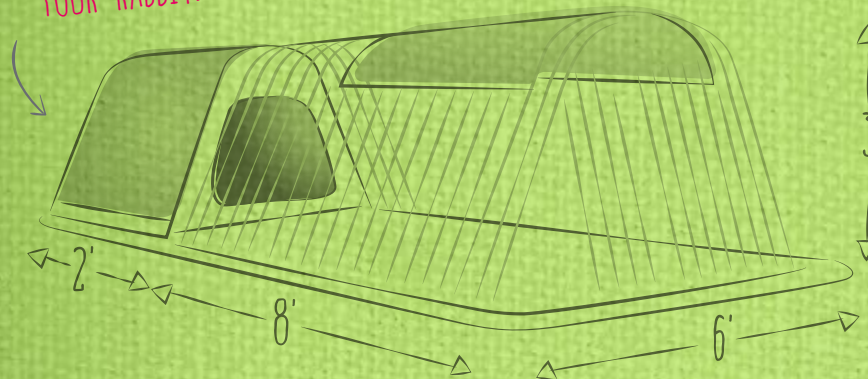
Lack of exercise, a poor diet, unclean conditions and loneliness are all issues seen in our pet rabbits, but don't worry – some simple strategies can make the world of difference and help your bunny stay happy and healthy.



A HUTCH IS NOT ENOUGH

Wild rabbits, even in dense populations, occupy a territory of nearly two acres¹. This gives plenty of room to stretch their legs! An important part of keeping our pet rabbits healthy is giving them access to space for exercise. Many rabbits are still kept in a hutch, and while a well-designed hutch is OK for bedtime, it's just not large enough for full-time occupancy. This means that all rabbits need a run, or another safe exercise space, accessible from their hutch or cage. This can be indoors or outdoors, but must give your rabbits enough space to display natural behaviours like running, digging, jumping, hiding and grazing. Think of the hutch as a bedroom or warren – fine for a rest, but only one part of a home!

CREATE SHELTERED AREAS TO PROVIDE YOUR RABBITS WITH HIDING PLACES



It's not just about square footage, either. Rabbits are curious creatures! Just like us they need stimulation from their environment, so their exercise areas should be kept novel and interesting. While there are countless ways to keep your rabbits entertained, some classic ideas include platforms, boxes, rabbit-safe toys and hiding food to encourage your rabbit to forage. Rabbit-safe gardens and homes are also a great way to help rabbits get exercise and stimulation, but always supervise bunnies when they are out of their run or hutch.

Although mixing things up is exciting for your rabbits, it is recommended to keep their main bedroom and tunnels in the same place, so they know where their safe spaces are when they want to hide away or rest.

RABBITS SHOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE THREE HOPS IN A ROW AND STRETCH FULLY UPRIGHT.



The Rabbit Welfare Association recommends that in order for rabbits to have enough space, rabbit runs should be at least 8 foot long, 6 foot wide and 3 foot tall².

TWO'S COMPANY

Rabbits naturally live together in groups. While lots of human companionship is great for a rabbit, having a friend from the same species is an essential ingredient to your rabbit's happiness. Rabbit associations and rescues now recommend always keeping more than one rabbit to stop your rabbit getting lonely and frustrated. Guinea pigs, contrary to popular belief, do not make suitable companions for rabbits. Not only do they speak a different language and have different diets, rabbits have powerful back legs and can accidentally injure a friend.

Starting with two rabbits is the easiest way to have a happy pair of bunnies. Rabbits can be together from birth, or rehomed as bonded pairs, and these long-term partnerships are usually the calmest. If you already have a single rabbit though, consider introducing another. An introduction between two rabbits, or 'bonding', can take weeks but is well worth the effort.

Whether together from birth, or friends later in life, rabbits work best in mixed gender pairs, with one female and one male.

Importantly, both should be neutered. While the benefits of neutering in mixed-sex pairs may be clear, did you know it's important to neuter even male-male and female-female pairs?

That's because the high hormone levels in unneutered rabbits can lead to fighting, even between the most loved-up bunnies. Neutering has other benefits too; your rabbits will be calmer with you and your family, and the risk of some health problems such as specific cancers will be reduced.

ALTHOUGH RABBITS ARE VERY SOCIAL ANIMALS, it is important for them to be able to spend time alone in their home if they want to. If you have two or more rabbits, make sure there are enough hiding places, as well as sufficient food and water, for everyone.

FRIENDS!

A STUDY HAS SHOWN RABBITS WILL SEEK COMPANIONSHIP AS READILY AS FOOD!³



KITCHEN NIGHTMARES

Providing the right food for your rabbit is critical for making their home perfect, especially as they spend 6-8 hours a day eating. **A proper diet will support your rabbits' dental, gastrointestinal and mental health, and it's very simple to provide.**

So what do our rabbits need? Unlike us, rabbits don't need variety in their diet. In fact, they could survive on just hay and water alone! Some fresh leafy vegetables and pelleted food are recommended though, to give your rabbits a well-rounded diet. Muesli, while looking appealing, gives rabbits a chance to be picky and can mean they don't get everything they need.

Diet supports mental health by encouraging normal eating patterns, such as grazing and foraging. When planning your rabbit's home you can use this to your advantage. Hiding food is a great way to enrich your rabbit's environment; put some pellets under their hay to encourage foraging, or hide pieces in toys or tubes. Just remember to clear up anything they haven't discovered at the end of the day.



HANGING BASKETS ARE LARGE ENOUGH TO HOLD PLENTY OF HAY AND CAN BE AN INTERESTING ADDITION TO YOUR RABBITS' HOME. HAY OR GRASS IS REALLY IMPORTANT FOR A RABBIT'S HEALTH, AND SHOULD MAKE UP AT LEAST 70% OF THEIR DIET!

FOCUS ON FLYSTRIKE

One of the most devastating consequences of poor rabbit care is flystrike. Also known as 'myiasis', this killer condition occurs when flies lay eggs in fur, which then hatch into maggots. These maggots reach adulthood in less than twenty-four hours and feed on living flesh. This causes the rabbit to go into shock, leading to death if not picked up rapidly.

As flies are attracted to damp and smelly surroundings, flystrike is much more common in rabbits who are not kept clean and dry. This can be due to external factors such as infrequent hutch cleaning, or an unprotected cage which lets in rain, but can also be due to health conditions. Poor gastrointestinal health can lead to a mucky bottom, or problems with dental or joint health can mean rabbits cannot keep themselves clean.

FLYSTRIKE CAN OCCUR AT ANY TIME, BUT IS MUCH MORE COMMON IN THE SUMMER MONTHS.



Thankfully you can protect your rabbits from this terrible disease by implementing a few simple steps:

- Keep your rabbits' living areas clean and dry
- Disinfect your rabbits' hutch or cage at least once a week
- Give your rabbits a healthy diet
- Check your rabbits all over – in fly season, it's recommended to do this twice a day
- Use fly screens
- Regularly use preventative products from your vet

For more information on flystrike visit vets4pets.com/flystrike

BIRDS

Birds can be extraordinarily loving with people they trust and make fantastic pets when properly cared for. Having the right environment for your bird or birds will bring out the best in their personality, as well as keeping them in tip-top health too.



SO WHAT MIGHT YOU NEED TO STOP YOUR BIRD GETTING RUFFLED FEATHERS?



Cage, aviary or coop - Whatever bird you are getting, they will need space to move around (including fly, if they can) and enrichment. While there are minimums for housing, we would always recommend getting the largest cage or coop you can.



Enrichment - Enrichment means being in a stimulating environment. This means toys, things to chew or dig through and interesting things to eat. The best enrichment will depend on your bird's personality and species, but keeping things interesting is important for any pet!



Perches - Having somewhere to stand and roost is important. Make sure these are the right diameter for your bird's feet and that you provide several at different heights.



Cage stand - Raised cages should be supported by a strong frame which will keep the aviary safe and secure. Movable stands are useful to help you give your birds a different view, or go outside for periods.



Litter and linings - Dealing with waste is never fun, but getting good quality liners and litter can help. Don't forget cat litter is toxic to birds, so speak to a specialist if you aren't sure of your bird's needs.



Food - It's important to get your bird's diet right. This might include mineral supplements, so speak to a specialist if you aren't sure of your birds needs.



Food dishes - These should be sturdy so they don't tip over.



Water dispenser - A hanging water bottle or trough often works well to keep water clean.

DON'T FORGET... to consider outside their normal living space too! Many pet birds are let out of the cages for periods, unless they are a species that does not like handling, such as finches. 'Bird-proofing' is an important consideration for any areas your bird might get to.



FISH



It can be tempting to think that fish don't have much character, but anyone who has studied a tank can tell you that fish have a range of personalities!

Getting the right type of fish for your family is really important, and different types of fish require different homes. This simple guide can help you pick the right type of fish for you.

GOLDFISH

Cold water tanks are relatively easy to maintain, have the lowest running costs and make good starter projects. However, this doesn't make them a small commitment - goldfish can live up to twenty years in the right conditions, are messy so need good filtration and frequent partial water changes, and require a large tank to allow them to grow.

TEMPERATE FISH

Suitable for an unheated aquarium located in a warm centrally heated room, the temperate fish are small, active, colourful and hardy, and so are ideal for smaller aquariums without a heater such as desk top and kids tanks. These are a much better choice than goldfish for a first aquarium and especially a small child's tank as these little fish won't out grow their tank like goldfish will.

FRESHWATER TROPICAL

Needing a little more care than their cold-water counterparts, freshwater tropical fish are a staple type of fish seen across the UK. Needing more equipment and care, due to requiring heated water and a finer balance of water condition, they also usually have a bright and wide variety of fish species and can be great fun for a family.

SALTWATER (MARINE)

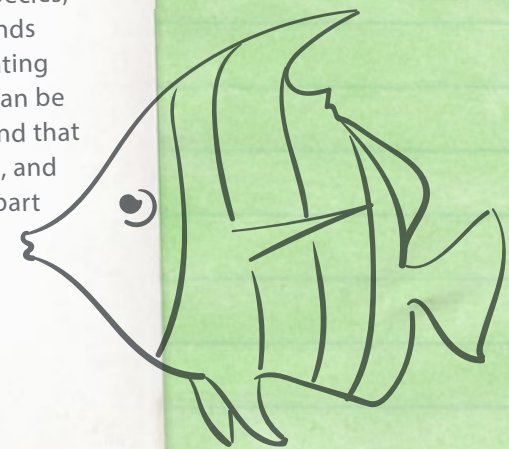
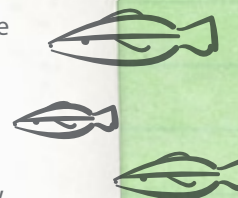
The most complicated of tanks, marine tanks need close regulation and are expensive to run, maintain and stock. That being said, the variety of incredible inhabitants these environments can sustain make them a fascinating project for a serious enthusiast.

POND

A pond environment can allow you to have much bigger species, such as carp, and stable ponds can do a good job of regulating themselves to a degree. It can be difficult to set up a new pond that is suitable for some species, and regular feeding should be part of your routine.



DID YOU KNOW THAT FISH ARE THE UK'S MOST POPULAR PET? WE HAVE 25 MILLION OF THEM!



REPTILES

There are lots of different reptile species, all of which have their own specific needs. Thinking about the type of environment each species originates from is an important starting point for making sure you have the right equipment for keeping your reptile species happy and healthy. Reptiles that like to climb, such as chameleons, will need tall enclosures, while ground-dwellers need more floor area. Don't forget room for a pool too if your reptile likes water! Whatever shape you need, always get a vivarium to fit your reptile's adult size.



Once you've found a suitable vivarium or enclosure for your reptile it's time to think about what you need to kit it out with. Reptiles are cold-blooded, and that means in most cases they will need a source of heat in their enclosure. This can be via a special light source that provides heat, or with heat mats or heat tape if appropriate.

As well as heat, reptiles also need a source of UV light. There are two types of UV light which are important for reptiles; they need UVA to encourage natural behaviours, and UVB which is important for making vitamin D.

Some reptiles can get heat and UV from the same lamp while others need separate provision, so taking the time to research the requirements of your reptile species is critical.

While heat is important, it's also important to make sure that things don't get too hot! Having a warmer end and a cooler end of the vivarium will allow your reptile to adjust to wherever they feel most comfortable.

You'll also need to think about what substrate to use on the floor, how to keep the vivarium interesting with 'furniture' like branches and hidey-holes, and how you are going to provide fresh food and water safely.

With so much to consider, it's important to speak to a reptile expert before you bring home any new cold-blooded family members.

GREEN IGUANAS LOVE WATER! ACCESS TO FREQUENT SWIMMING OPPORTUNITIES HELPS THEM DEFECCATE, DRINK AND IS GREAT FOR KIDNEY HEALTH TOO.



FERRETS

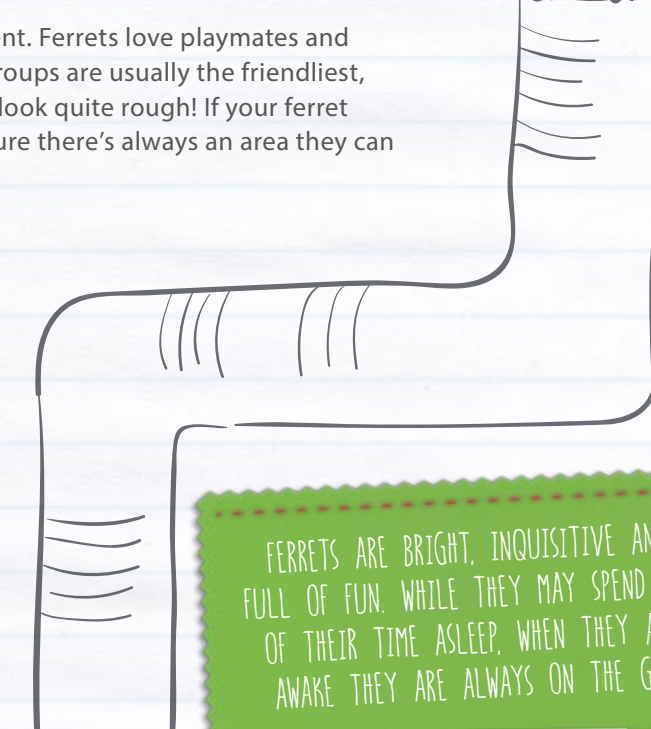
Ferrets are bright, inquisitive and full of fun. While they may spend 75% of their time asleep, when they are awake they are always on the go! This playful nature means that they need a really interesting environment to stop them becoming bored. Boredom can lead to abnormal behaviours developing, as well as reduced welfare.

Living in groups is really important for enrichment. Ferrets love playmates and should always be housed with a friend. Stable groups are usually the friendliest, although play-fighting between ferrets can still look quite rough! If your ferret isn't in the mood for rough-and-tumble, make sure there's always an area they can escape to for some peace and quiet.

Cage furniture such as tubes, nests and paper bags make for really interesting exploration and swapping in new, exciting hidey-holes is a great way to keep your ferrets entertained.

You'll need space for this, and the recommended minimum size cage for a pair of ferrets is 10ft long by 6ft wide by 6ft high. While not good jumpers, ferrets will love to make use of the vertical space, pulling themselves up whenever there's a climbing opportunity. Ferrets will also drag ferret-safe toys around, dig in deep litter, forage for hidden food and adore a water bath, so get creative with your enrichment!

For those rest times between activities, ferrets need a relaxing sleeping area with dry, warm nesting material. They also need a separate toilet area, as they are clean creatures. They will usually go to the toilet in the same place, and can even learn to use a litter tray!



FERRETS ARE BRIGHT, INQUISITIVE AND FULL OF FUN. WHILE THEY MAY SPEND 75% OF THEIR TIME ASLEEP, WHEN THEY ARE AWAKE THEY ARE ALWAYS ON THE GO!



SOO SLEEPY!

Safe Trips, Home and Abroad



PRE-TRAVEL CHECKLIST

PASSPORT CONTENTS

TRAVEL COMPANY POLICIES

MEDICATION



From a wander down to the local shop, to a vacation on sunnier shores, we commonly take our dogs out and about with us. Our partners in adventure, 'pups' are great at getting us exploring.

Sadly, accidents, illnesses and transport issues are all quick ways to spoil the fun. Knowing how to keep your pet safe and sound while on the move means that the whole family can relax, smile and enjoy spending quality time with your furriest family member!

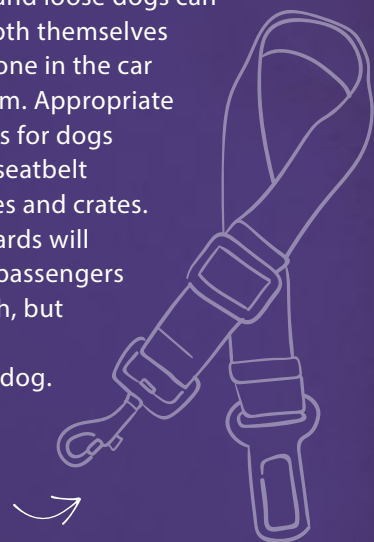
CAR TRAVEL

Being confident taking your dog in the car is a passport to exploring more rural areas, and can make journeys further afield much easier. Safe restraint, and a dog that feels comfortable and calm while in the car, are both key factors to a relaxing and enjoyable trip.

SAFETY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION WHEN TRAVELLING WITH YOUR DOG.

Making sure your dog is restrained properly is the best way to keep everyone safe, and is also a legal requirement. We have to wear a seatbelt, and for good reason. Crashes can cause devastating injuries and loose dogs can injure both themselves and anyone in the car with them. Appropriate restraints for dogs include seatbelt harnesses and crates. Boot guards will protect passengers in a crash, but do little for your dog.

SAFETY FIRST!



TOP TIPS FOR CAR TRAVEL WITH YOUR DOG:

- 1 Head in the car please!** Sticking your head out of the window can feel fun, but accidents happen and impacts at speed can have awful consequences. Dogs with their head out of the window can also be a distraction for other drivers!
- 2 Airbags on or off?** Depending on how you are restraining your dog you may want to disable specific airbags. While riding in the front passenger seat can be a distraction, and dogs are generally safer in the back seats, if your dog is harnessed in the front check the manufacturer's airbag recommendations.
- 3 Is it hot in here?** Dogs die in hot cars and cars can heat up remarkably fast, even when they aren't in full sun. Cranking a window is not enough – never leave your dog alone in the car. Heat can also be a problem when you are moving. Sun blinds can help prevent your dog being stuck in a pool of sunlight on a journey. Think about making sure your dog is on the shadier side of the car if you can.
- 4 Get out on the safest side.** Only ever let your dog out of the car onto the pavement side – never into the road. This is for your safety as well as theirs! Training your dog to wait in the car until you have told them they can exit is also really helpful. This gives you time to get them safely on their lead, assess traffic or other dangers, and get them out in a controlled and stress-free fashion.
- 5 Regular breaks.** Stopping every few hours for a leg stretch, water and a toilet break is really important to keep everyone in the car comfortable.
- 6 Keep an eye out.** Dogs can suffer from car sickness so watching for any signs of discomfort, and being able to take an extra break if your dog needs to, can help avoid unfortunate accidents.

A TICK FOR PARASITE PROTECTION

While we all know the importance of keeping up regular flea and worm protection for our dogs, did you know that their parasite risk might be different depending on the time of year, where you walk them and where in the country you are?

Ticks are a good example. These blood-thirsty parasites use their large jaws to latch on in order to feed. When they attach they are generally small, but can grow rapidly as they engorge with blood.

Although tick bites can be uncomfortable, especially if ticks are not removed properly, it is the diseases carried and transmitted by ticks that pose the largest threat to our pets. These can be killers, and can turn a small tick bite into a serious and life-threatening illness.

While they can be found anywhere, ticks are typically located in long grass, rough upland, and woodland areas – especially those which are damp and have high humidity. The South of England, being warmer, has a higher tick population than the cooler North, although the long grasses and increasing average temperature of places like the Lake District and Scotland mean that tick populations are also growing there. Depending on where you live and your lifestyle your dog may have a low tick risk, be recommended seasonal protection, or benefit from tick protection all year round. This might be in the form of a collar, spot-ons or tablets. Importantly, if you live in a low risk area and don't use routine tick protection, always consider tick protection when you are travelling elsewhere.

Wherever you live, if you're planning on travelling within the UK or abroad, it's worth speaking to your vet about the parasite risk where you're heading, and checking your dog doesn't need anything extra to keep them fully covered.

1. MSD Animal Health. *The Big Tick Project*. 2016. 2. *Estimating Lyme disease risk using pet dogs as sentinels*. Smith, FD, et al. 2, 2012. *Comparative Immunology, Microbiology and Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 35, pp. 163-167.



The most common disease carried by ticks is Lyme disease.

IN A STUDY, 24% OF TICKS FOUND ON UK DOGS WERE CARRYING LYME DISEASE?

The clinical signs include recurrent lameness, lethargy and fever, but not the classic 'bullseye' skin lesion seen in people.


If left untreated Lyme disease can lead to more serious conditions such as kidney disease and heart failure.

NOT ALL THOSE WHO WANDER ARE LOST





Part of the joy of dog ownership is discovering somewhere new to walk. Exploring is fantastic, but it's important to consider that there may be hazards you are unaware of. These can include unanticipated cliffs, unsafe seas, and problems such as broken fencing or accessible roads.


Planning ahead is a great way to make sure you have plenty of dog-friendly expeditions available. Many organisations, including the Blue Cross and the National Trust, have suggested routes or locations available online. Be aware that things can change though, and structures like fencing can become damaged. This is especially important near fast-flowing rivers, roads and cliff edges, where dogs can get into serious trouble.



IF YOUR DOG GETS INTO TROUBLE IN THE SEA, CALL THE COASTGUARD ON 999 AND WAIT FOR HELP.


That doesn't mean you should avoid walks near these types of areas. Some simple precautions can make sure everyone stays safe, and lets you enjoy the fantastic scenery on offer.



Talk to local people or tourist information to get as much information as possible on the surrounding area.


Some dogs love swimming but not all breeds are good swimmers and any dog can get into difficulty, especially if there are strong currents or large waves. Checking that the area is safe for swimming, and using a doggy lifejacket, will help keep your dog safe if you think they may want to take a dip. Crucially, if your dog gets into difficulty in water, do not follow them in. Stay safe, and get help.


If you are going beach-walking, take the time to check tidal information. The tide can come in fast, and can trap unwary walkers. Mudflats are especially risky, and are best avoided entirely.


Keep dogs on a non-extendable lead. This is the best way to keep them safe on unfamiliar routes, even ones which have been branded 'dog safe'


Brighter is better! Wherever you walk the more visible you and your dog are the safer you will be. Think about what colours you are wearing, use reflective clothes, and carry a light source. Don't forget your dog either – light up collars and leads as well as reflective harnesses will help drivers, other walkers and (in the worst case scenario) rescue teams spot them easily.


Dogs may not be aware of cliff edges, especially if they are excited. The RNLI recommends that you and your dog should keep at least the height of the cliff away from the edge to stay safe.

RNLI

CASE STUDY -

At 8.30am on Friday the 28th September 2018, volunteers from Criccieth's RNLI Lifeboat Station were called to rescue a walker and his spaniel cut off by an incoming tide at Black Rock Sands. The beach is notorious for cutting off people not familiar with the tide times, as water fills lower lying sands higher up the beach. The water in these channels can be fast flowing, deep and can rapidly become dangerous.

In this case, the dog walker had walked out onto a sandbar without noticing the rapid tidal flow and became stranded. RNLI volunteer and spokesperson Ifer Gwyn says the rescue wasn't unusual. "We respond to dozens of these calls. It's a very dangerous beach if you don't know what to watch out for."

The incoming tide, which can approach walking speed, is especially dangerous for holidaymakers, who are often unprepared for such a rapid shift. "It only takes six inches of flowing water to knock you off your feet," says Ifer, "and the shifting sand banks make conditions even more dangerous."

The rescue might not have been unusual, but it was certainly close. By the time the team reached the dog walker the water was only a couple of feet away from him and his dog. Working quickly the team rapidly transferred both the walker and his dog into the lifeboat and got them both to shore safe but unnerved. Less than ten minutes later, the area he had been stood on was submerged. "It is classed as a life saved, as the man had no other way to return back to shore safely."

Ifer highlights the importance of checking for local hazards, and taking the time to research tide times before you go out on beach walks. "Taking your best friend out for a walk is great, just make sure you are both going to be safe." Good advice!

Ifer also stresses the difficulties associated with animal rescues. "With people you can explain," he says, "but dogs are often unfamiliar with boats, and can become protective of their owner, which can make them behave very differently from normal."



PET PASSPORTS*

If your pet enjoys travel, going on holiday with them can be a great experience. The Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) currently allows dogs, cats and ferrets to hold a 'pet passport', which means that your joint adventures don't

have to be restricted to the UK! The pet passport allows pets who are over 15 weeks old to travel within the EU and some other countries, and to come back to the UK without having to spend time in quarantine.



GETTING A PET PASSPORT

In order for your dog to get a passport they need:

AN APPOINTMENT WITH AN APPROPRIATE VET

Not all vets hold the additional qualification to be able to issue passports, so you may need to see a different vet for this.

A RABIES VACCINATION

Rabies vaccinations can only be given to pets over 12 weeks old, and your pet will need routine booster vaccinations.

A MICROCHIP

The microchip must be implanted before (or at the same time as) the rabies vaccination for the rabies vaccination to count for the pet passport.

Parasite treatments are not needed to acquire a passport, but a vet must give any dog returning to the UK a tapeworm treatment, and record this on the passport. This treatment needs to be given no less than 24 hours and no more than 120 hours (5 days) before you enter the UK, so be prepared to visit the local vets while you are away.



PRE-TRAVEL CHECKLIST

THE PASSPORT

Only the original passport document will be accepted – no photocopies! It is sensible to get your pet's first passport at least a month before travel. The rabies vaccination must have been given at least 21 days before your pet plans to re-enter the UK using the pet passport, so you need to leave time for this waiting period. It may also take time for your vet to issue the passport, especially during busy summer periods

PASSPORT CONTENTS

Your pet passport must include: details of ownership (including your signature), a description of your pet, their microchip number and any other distinguishing features, a vet-signed and in-date rabies vaccination (including the batch number of the vaccine, the manufacturer and product name, and the date the vaccination will expire), details of the vet issuing the passport and details of your dog's tapeworm treatment, which should also be signed by a vet.

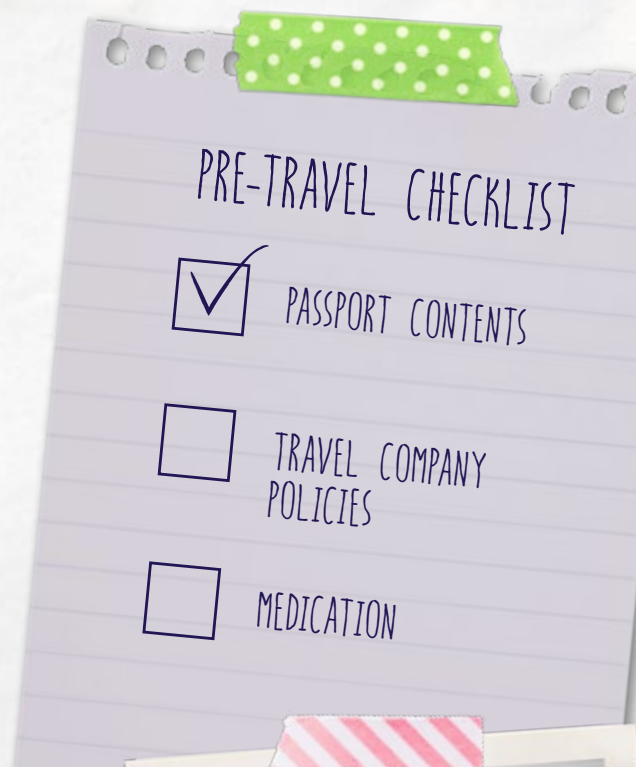
TRAVEL COMPANY POLICIES

Not all travel companies accept pets, or they may only accept pets if they are caged in a certain way or meet certain requirements. Making sure to clarify the travel arrangements for your pet with your train, ship or airline company is key to a smooth journey. Some transport companies will require your pet to have a 'fitness to travel' certificate. A vet must issue this, within the time scale required by the transport company.

MEDICATION

Dogs will need to be given a tapeworm treatment before they return to the UK. You can get this from a vet in the country you are visiting, but you can also take this with you from your own vet if you prefer (although a qualified vet will still need to approve and give the treatment, and sign your pet's passport). If your pet is on any long term medication, make sure you have that with you too, and talk to your vet in advance about any extra parasite protection your pet may need while they are away.

For more information see www.vets4pets.com/petpassports



TRAVELLING ABROAD- DISEASE RISKS



While travelling abroad with your dog can give you lots of great, new experiences, there are also diseases that you wouldn't have to consider at home. If you're taking your pet with you on holiday, it's important to consider how best to protect them while you're away.

Some of the most worrying diseases include leishmaniasis, heartworm, ehrlichiosis and babesiosis. Insects transmit all of these diseases and they can be life threatening.



HEARTWORM

Heartworms (*Dirofilaria immitis*) are threadlike-worms that can grow up to 30cm long. They live within the heart and in the main artery leading from the heart to the lungs. Sadly, large numbers of heartworms can block blood flow and affected dogs are at risk of deadly complications.

Mosquitoes transmit heartworm, which means they are more prevalent in warmer areas like Southern Europe. The maturation process for heartworm is slow, and it can take six months for the worms to even reach the heart after an infection starts. The slow progression of this infection means that even dogs who have not travelled for some time should still be considered as 'at risk' of developing heartworm unless they have had appropriate parasite treatments.

LEISHMANIASIS

Leishmania is transmitted by sandflies, which are common in Mediterranean countries. Dogs who contract *leishmaniasis* may not show signs for months or even years, but dogs with active infections may have weight loss, skin changes, eye problems, lameness and even organ failure.



EHRlichiosis AND BABESIOSIS

Both of these diseases are transmitted by infected tick bites, although ticks usually have to be attached for more than 24 hours for transmission to occur. The *Ehrlichia canis* bacteria is seen in ticks across the Mediterranean and lives within white blood cells in affected dogs. Although initial signs tend to only last a few weeks it can be impossible to fully treat *ehrlichiosis* in some dogs. This can affect their immune system, their red blood cell production and their ability to clot. *Babesia canis* is found across all of Europe and destroys red blood cells. *Babesiosis* causes anaemia and a characteristic red urine. Both diseases, if left untreated, can lead to death or severe illness.

LEAVING YOUR PET BEHIND



While some pets love to travel, others are much happier with their home comforts. Part of holiday preparations is making sure your pet has the best care while you're away.

This can be having people drop in, a professional pet-sitter, or a stay at a local boarding facility. What's best will depend on your pet, your trip and your budget! Of these options, boarding can seem the most disruptive, but a little time and energy can make sure your pet feels happy and secure when staying away from home – helping them enjoy their holiday too!

SOME TIPS FOR PUTTING YOUR DOG IN KENNELS INCLUDE:

CHECK YOUR KENNELS IN ADVANCE

A good kennel should have no problem with you visiting ahead of time to see where they keep the dogs, and the condition. Check the dogs seem content, although expect some barking when you visit, and go with your instinct about if you feel your dog would be happy there. Good questions to ask include whether they feed each dog their own food, if they are happy giving medication if necessary and how often the dogs are walked.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation can be a great way to find a kennel – your vet may be able to help, and there are a wealth of review sites online. Don't forget what suits one dog may not suit another, so make sure to assess a kennel from the point of view of your own needs.

PAPERWORK

You may need to provide evidence that your dog has been vaccinated, as well as details of your vet and emergency contact details. It is also worth leaving information on your dog's likes and dislikes – think about favourite toys and treats, as well as any problems they may have with other dogs or lead walking. The more information your kennels have, the better they can help your dog settle in.

UPDATES

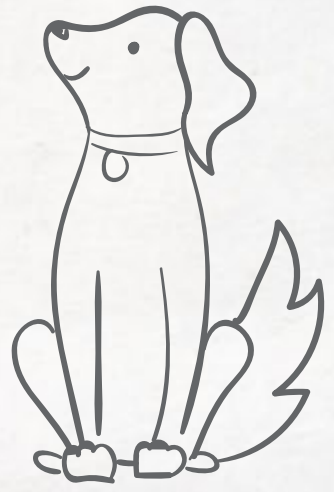
In the age of social media, some kennels will post daily updates on their current residents, so you can check up on your pet while you are away. Ask your kennel if this is a service that they provide.

MULTI-DOG

If you have more than one dog, they will likely be best housed together. Make sure the kennels know you will be bringing multiple dogs, and check that larger pens are provided for multiple boarders.

BELONGINGS

The more familiar your dog is with their surroundings, the happier they will be. Taking their own bedding, toys and food will help keep your dog feeling secure. Using their own food will also help keep their tummy settled, as a change of diet can cause diarrhoea.



Getting to the Heart of Blood Donation



Just like people, sick and injured dogs may need blood transfusions and in many cases these can be the difference between life and death.

We are all familiar with the concept of donating human blood and many of us donate regularly. Our blood is collected, processed, stored, and sent to those in need. Despite this surprisingly few people are aware that a similar service exists for dogs. Called Pet Blood Bank UK, this unique charity provides a life-saving service for dogs across the country, with blood heading out of the centre and across the country at any time of the day or night.

This service is especially critical because Pet Blood Bank UK is allowed to collect, store and distribute blood. Vets in the UK can take blood from a donor dog and use this blood within their own practice, but very few will store fresh blood themselves. While many vets have some pets 'on call' for blood donation in an emergency, this system relies on the availability and health of the donor at the time the blood is required, and on having pets and owners who are willing to volunteer.

Here we follow the journey of canine blood from the dogs who donate for Pet Blood Bank UK, right through to the lifesaving blood transfusion, and talk to some of the people who make this incredible service happen.

BLOOD

FACT FILE

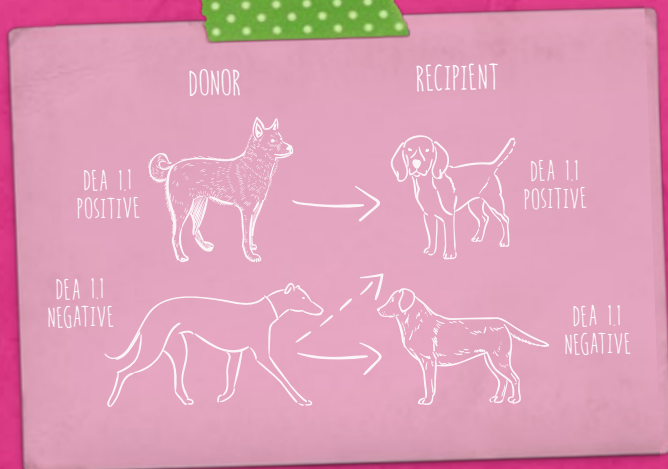
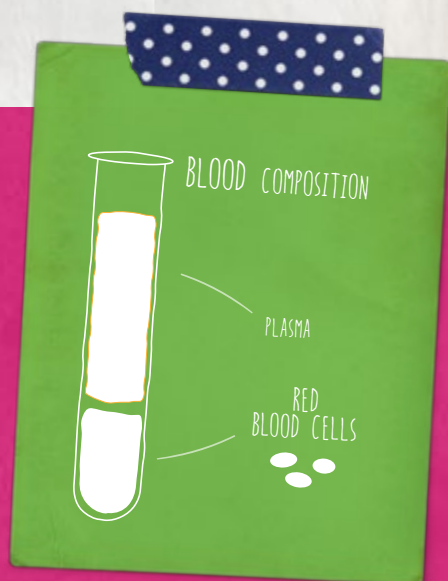
Canine blood is much like our own, a natural soup of red and white blood cells, proteins, platelets and plasma.

RED BLOOD CELLS

These cells carry oxygen around the body. Dogs with low red blood cell levels (anaemia) may have pale gums, be tired or out of breath, may have a faster than normal heart rate and can go off their food. As red blood cells are living cells they need to be carefully looked after post-donation to keep them healthy and ready for transfusion.

PLASMA

This is the yellowish fluid that red blood cells float in. Plasma contains proteins, glucose, clotting factors, electrolytes and hormones, so is given via transfusion to dogs who need these components boosting.



Interestingly, just like us, dogs have red blood cell types. The two main types are DEA 1 positive and DEA 1 negative. The positive and negative refer to the presence of a specific structure on the outside of the red blood cells, called an antigen. From research carried out by Pet Blood Bank UK, it is estimated 30% of dogs naturally don't have this antigen, and are therefore DEA 1 negative.

DEA 1 positive blood is only suitable for dogs who are also DEA 1 positive. This is because DEA 1 positive blood sets off an immune response in dogs which are DEA 1 negative. While a single transfusion like this is suitable in an emergency, after this the immune system is much more sensitive to DEA 1 positive blood. This means a mismatched second transfusion could be fatal.

DEA 1 negative blood doesn't set off an immune response in a DEA 1 positive or DEA 1 negative recipient as it has no antigen.

There are other blood types above DEA 1 but these are usually of less clinical significance or rare in the general dog population – hence typing tests are not widely available for them. All dogs should be cross matched for any transfusion more than four days after their first transfusion.

WHILE ALL BLOOD DONORS ARE GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED, SOME BREEDS HAVE A HIGHER CHANCE OF BEING DEA 1 NEGATIVE. THIS BLOOD CAN BE USED FOR ALL DOG BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS AND IS REALLY USEFUL!

THESE BREEDS ARE:



DOBERMANNS



FLAT COATED RETRIEVERS



WEIMARANERS



GERMAN WIREHAIR ED POINTERS



GREYHOUNDS



AIREDALE TERRIERS



POINTERS



ITALIAN SPINONES



GERMAN SHEPHERDS



LURCHERS

BLOOD DONATION IS A FAMILY AFFAIR!

PET BLOOD BANK UK COULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT DONORS, AND CHRIS HAS BEEN A HUGE SUPPORTER SINCE THE VERY BEGINNING. PRESENT AT THE SECOND EVER BLOOD DONATION SESSION OVER TEN YEARS AGO, CHRIS'S DOGS HAVE BEEN WELL-KNOWN AND WELL-LOVED REGULARS EVER SINCE.

Chris got involved when a local greyhound rescue asked him if he would be interested. Sighthounds like greyhounds and lurchers often make great donors, and the rescue centre were supporting Pet Blood Bank UK by contacting owners of recently rehomed dogs. "I had no idea dogs could give blood when I was first approached, but it sounded like a good idea," he says. His initial reaction was a common one; many people are still unaware that dogs can donate blood, although it has been legally approved in the UK since 2005. Interested, Chris was more than happy to bring his dogs along and give it a go. "After all," he says, "if it didn't go well, I just wouldn't have gone back!" Thankfully, it did go well. So well, in

fact, one of his dogs Kai fell asleep on the table while donating. Chris puts this down to the atmosphere and attention of the team. "They look at how the dogs react and they always put the welfare of the dogs first. Some people think that they might take the blood no matter what, but it's actually the complete opposite of that. The primary concern is always for the happiness of the dogs on the day, and mine love it."

This strict 'welfare first' policy goes further than just relaxed dogs. Pet Blood Bank UK ensures all dogs are weighed, fit and healthy on examination, and have their donated blood screened. Chris says he has seen the benefits of that himself.

Monty was a regular donor, but the Pet Blood Bank team called me one day to say they had found an anomaly in his blood. One of his liver markers was raised, and they advised I take him straight to the vets. He was well in himself, but liver problems often don't have visible signs until they are really serious. Thanks to Pet Blood Bank UK screening we picked up Monty's problem really early on, and got him on the right treatment. A year later he was back donating again!

Chris is keen to point out that his experience isn't with a single dog. "I've had fourteen dogs regularly donating since I started, and in that whole time we have only had to cut a donation short twice." Some of his dogs, before their enforced retirement at nine years old, will have donated over thirty times. "They know what's happening and they don't mind. There's treats and fuss – often they don't want to leave!"

Chris's dogs are so good at donating, Pet Blood Bank UK have even called on him in an emergency. "They called me and said they were really low on blood," he recalls. "I told them to come down, and they set up in my kitchen which was very unusual! Seven of my dogs donated that day, although it was a little strange seeing my kitchen set up like a vets."

Chris has no idea how many dogs his dogs' donations have saved, but he knows it must be in the hundreds. He has no plans of stopping either, while his dogs still enjoy the experience. "It's a no-brainer," he says. "It's fab." And, with an attitude like that, it seems that Chris and his dogs are destined to save a few hundred more.

"I HAD NO IDEA DOGS COULD GIVE BLOOD"



THE WOMAN BEHIND THE NEEDLE

So, which dogs can donate blood, and what should you expect if you take your dog along to a session? Jenny from Pet Blood Bank UK works at the donation sessions and tells us what to expect.

"Firstly, donors have to meet a set of strict criteria. They have to be over 25kg, have their core vaccinations, be on no medication except for flea and worm treatments, and be between one and eight years old. Our dogs retire on their ninth birthday, and some bigger breeds like the Great Danes retire earlier than that."

For dogs that do meet the criteria, Jenny is keen to stress that this doesn't mean they will donate. "The key thing is that this is a voluntary program. At every donation session we assess dogs on three areas; compliance, welfare and anatomy. Our dogs have to be happy to lie still for us, not be stressed or anxious about the experience, and have a vein that is suitable for us to take blood from. Dogs also have to undergo blood screening and a health check. If we have any concerns or worries at all we won't take the blood."

"PET BLOOD BANK UK IS BASED ON THE WELFARE OF THE DONOR JUST AS MUCH AS THE RECIPIENT"

- Jenny, Pet Blood Bank UK

"The owners have to be comfortable too," Jenny advises. "We spend a lot of time with owners, especially at the first donation session, discussing the process and making sure they are 100% happy to go ahead." On average, 75% of the dogs that come to a session will donate.

DONATION CRITERIA CHECKLIST

- Over 25kg
- Core Vaccinations
- Age 1 - 8
- No medications



While the criteria are stringent, Jenny says they've taken blood from just about every type of dog over 25kg! "We don't allow Chow Chows, as their pigmented tongues make it difficult to assess their colour, and bulldogs can struggle with breathing in the position we need them to lie in. We also don't allow any dogs on the dangerous dogs register. Beyond that, we've seen everything!"

"VETS4PETS HAVE BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE SUCCESS OF PET BLOOD BANK UK. WE'RE REALLY GRATEFUL THAT THEY HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH US SINCE 2007. BLOOD IS SO PRECIOUS, FROM START TO FINISH"

- Jenny, Pet Blood Bank UK

Part of the success of Pet Blood Bank UK is the vigorous training of the team. "The blood is taken by trained phlebotomists who are already qualified veterinary nurses. They are highly skilled in taking blood and give our dogs the most comfortable and efficient experience. Each unit is usually taken in about five minutes! We encourage our owners to stay with their dog throughout, so they can see our team work and be there to reassure their dog. While our seasoned donors are very relaxed, first-timers can be a little nervous."

Jenny finds that the dogs seem to enjoy each donation session more and more, likely due to the treats, tickles, toys and bandanas given out at the end! "With the exemplary skill of the team, the understanding of our owners, the wonderful dogs and the support of practices such as Vets4Pets we make blood donation a stress-free experience for everyone."



↖ BRAVE BOY!

KEEPING THE BLOOD FLOWING

DID YOU KNOW?

SO WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR DOG'S DONATED BLOOD ONCE IT HAS BEEN COLLECTED? WENDY FROM PET BLOOD BANK UK EXPLAINS.

"We aim to get all blood processed and stored within 24 hours of donation, so everything has to be very efficient. First, the donated blood gets packed into a transportation box at the venue. Although it looks like a cool box, it's actually designed to keep the blood warm! The donated blood gets brought straight to our centre, signed in, then kept safely at room temperature until our lab team arrive at 6am. All of our temperature controlled areas have constant temperature monitoring, as well as an alarm, so we are immediately told if there are any problems.



"Once the lab team arrive they begin to process the blood. This involves weighing, blood-typing, and centrifuging all the new donations. Centrifuges are large machines which spin the blood for 15 minutes. This forces the heavy red blood cells to collect at one end of the bag, leaving the plasma at the other end. These two parts are then manually separated. Each unit of red blood and plasma can be split in half, which means one blood donation may actually go to help four different dogs!



ONE BLOOD DONATION MAY ACTUALLY GO TO HELP FOUR DIFFERENT DOGS!

"The units of red blood cells are given SAG-M, which is a nutrient solution that allows the red blood cells to survive for up to six weeks. They are then catalogued and stored in the fridge, ready for any dog who needs them.

"The plasma is stored differently as it is blast frozen. This can be used as fresh frozen plasma, which has a one year shelf life, or frozen plasma which can last up to five years. This means your dog's blood donation can save lives for half a decade! We also use plasma to make cryoprecipitate, which is a concentrated form of plasma. This is really useful for dogs, especially those with clotting disorders such as von Willebrand disease, an inherited disorder most commonly seen in Dobermans. Helpfully, as a by-product of creating the cryoprecipitate, we also make something called cryosupernatant. This is high in vitamin-K dependant clotting factors, and can also be used to help dogs in need – it is especially useful in some poisoning cases.

"With so many blood products, it's important to keep track of where the blood has come from. All donors are given an individual number, so we always know which dog each product has come from. Each blood product also shows the number of times that dog has donated. With over 9000 registered donors it can be hard to keep track, but we recognise some of our most regular dogs!

"Sadly, 9000 registered doesn't mean 9000 active donors. On average we have 1000 new registrations per year, but for many reasons dogs stop donating over time. That's why it's so important for us to have a constant flow of new donor dogs, so we're always recruiting."

"PET BLOOD DONATION IS VERY SIMILAR TO HUMAN BLOOD DONATION, EXCEPT WE OFFER PLENTY OF TUMMY RUBS - NOT SOMETHING YOU SEE AT A HUMAN DONATION CENTRE!"

- Wendy, Pet Blood Bank UK



"We also need more donors as we are getting more calls for blood than even before. Last year we sent out over 5000 blood products! To manage this we have a 24 hour desk service, 365 days a year. This means our team are always there to provide help and guidance, and to organise transport of blood whenever it's needed. Vets can order blood for next day delivery for non-critical cases, but in an emergency we can get a courier straight away, any time of the day or night. We try to get our blood on the road within an hour and a half of a call! We also send vets the special drip system needed to give blood safely. This system filters out any clots or other unwanted particles, which is really important when giving natural products.

IT'S SO IMPORTANT FOR US TO HAVE A CONSTANT FLOW OF NEW DONOR DOGS, SO WE'RE ALWAYS RECRUITING

Sign up now!

WWW.PETBLOODBANKUK.ORG

"Pet Blood Bank UK does amazing work, and is continually growing, but we are always looking ahead. Getting more donors, and especially those of rarer blood type DEA1 negative, is always a goal of ours so I would encourage anyone who thinks their dog might be able to help to sign up today!"

CHASE'S STORY

The whole reason Pet Blood Bank UK exists is to save lives, a fact Xanthe, and her collie-cross Chase, are all too familiar with. Now active fundraisers for Pet Blood Bank UK, Xanthe is sharing their story to help raise awareness for this fantastic charity.

"Chase was ten in February," she says. "He's a collie-cross-something, probably a lurcher." Like many owners of rescue dogs Xanthe isn't sure of Chase's parentage, but she has a pretty good idea of how rough his start in life was. "They called them the wild pups. Chase's mum was hit by a car, and the driver spotted she'd recently had puppies. He found them in a ditch."

Six weeks old and motherless, Chase ended up in an Irish rescue centre, before being brought over to England. In poor health, and with little socialisation, his chances didn't look good until he was brought home for a new start by his loving owner Xanthe. She recalls being amazed by him.

"He took to being a pet straight away. He's such a helpful chap, and he loves the vets!" Being so thin meant Chase needed regular weigh-ins at his local vets as he grew, helping them become firm friends. "The vets even have me on speed-dial!" Xanthe jokes.



Chase's problems started in autumn 2017, when he began 'fly-catching' – snapping at thin air. He was referred to Newmarket Animal Health Trust, who diagnosed him with a form of epilepsy and started him on medication. Understandably, Xanthe thought that was the end of it, and Chase was happily seizure-free on his pills. By the end of the year, though, Chase seemed to be slowing down. "He's not a young dog, so I thought it might be his arthritis, but I got him checked out at the vets anyway."

Xanthe's concern for Chase paid off, as on arrival at the vets it was clear he needed help. "The vet took one look at his pale gums and said he needed blood. As they didn't know why he was so anaemic, he went back to the Animal Health Trust for investigations and a blood transfusion. On arrival his blood count was 12, when it should be over 45!"

“THE VET TOOK ONE LOOK AT HIS PALE GUMS AND SAID HE NEEDED BLOOD. AS THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHY HE WAS SO ANAEMIC, HE WENT BACK TO THE ANIMAL HEALTH TRUST FOR INVESTIGATIONS AND A BLOOD TRANSFUSION. ON ARRIVAL HIS BLOOD COUNT WAS 12, WHEN IT SHOULD BE OVER 45!”

The hospital gave Chase a life-saving blood transfusion and started to investigate his puzzling anaemia. After many tests and scans, including a bone marrow biopsy, they discovered that Chase was having a very unusual reaction to his epilepsy medication which was causing his body to stop producing red blood cells. They started Chase on immunosuppressive medication to help kick-start his bone marrow into producing blood cells again, and changed his other pills, but Chase's body was slow to respond and in the meantime his body started to destroy the transfused blood cells which were keeping him alive.

As Chase's body had developed a protective response against 'foreign' blood, Chase had to be blood-typed to make sure he got the right type for a second transfusion. Couriered straight

from the Pet Blood Bank UK, this second transfusion pushed his blood count up into the forties, long enough for Chase's body to restart making blood cells itself. "I'd forgotten what 'normal' Chase was like," says Xanthe, remembering his recovery. "It's a real life-saving story. Without those blood transfusions, he would have died."

Xanthe still has to keep a close eye on Chase, and in the last few weeks Chase's blood count wobbled. Thankfully, he has stabilised and is currently doing well, which is great news. Although Chase will always need that little extra care, he is a very happy boy. After all, he has a loving family, his friends at the vets, and the safe knowledge that, if he ever needs them again, Pet Blood Bank UK is only a phone call away.

“IT'S A REAL LIFE-SAVING STORY. WITHOUT THOSE BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS, HE WOULD HAVE DIED.”



If you would like to enrol your dog as a Pet Blood Bank UK donor, register at www.petbloodbankuk.org

or call on

01509 232 222

The friendly team can go through some pre-screening questions, and get your dog booked in at your next local session!



THE **VET** 
REPORT
- 2019 -

www.vets4pets.com/vetreport2019



Vets4Pets
Putting your pet first