

THE VET REPORT

Choosing Your New Pet

Top tips for finding your ideal companion

Modern Veterinary Care

How vets work together to provide outstanding care for your pet

Why Dental Health Is Important

Preventing dental disease

Alabama Rot

An update on this mysterious disease

Behaviour Changes In Older Pets

Vital tips for spotting early signs

The Hardest Part Of Ownership

When it's time to say goodbye

CURRENT AFFAIRS IN PET HEALTH

Issue 4 | November 2017

Vets4Pets
Putting your pet first



WELCOME

This year's Vet Report has a theme: it follows the journey of pet ownership, looking at the delights and challenges of owning a pet throughout their life.

The first stage, of course, is choosing a pet. This is an important decision and not one to be undertaken lightly. We talk about the important considerations such as time, cost and space, and then explain some of the things to look out for when finding your chosen pet.

Veterinary care is advancing at great speed. We can now recognise and treat more diseases than ever before, which means that vets are becoming increasingly specialised in their roles. We look at how vets work together to provide cutting edge care for your pet.

Dental disease is the most common ailment of cats and dogs, so many owners of these species will have to deal with this at some point. Alex Smithson explains some common causes of dental disease, and how you can help to prevent and manage them at home.

Alabama Rot is the complete opposite of dental disease. It is a very rare condition of dogs, one about which we still know very little and which unfortunately proves fatal for the majority of dogs who develop it. We feature the latest information and developments about this worrisome condition.

Pets are living longer, healthier lives than ever before and this means that conditions affecting older pets are becoming more prevalent and better understood.

Behaviour changes in older pets can be very distressing for pet and owner alike, and veterinary behaviourist Sarah Heath discusses what can cause them and how they can be helped.

For many pet owners, the loss of a pet can be as traumatic as losing a friend or family member. Guest author Caroline Hewson has provided a sensitive and insightful article about this rarely discussed subject.

We hope that The Vet Report offers insights into your own journey with your pets, and remember that your veterinary team will be with you every step of the way.

Kind regards

Dr Huw Stacey

BVetMed DipAS(CABC) MRCVS

Vets4Pets Director of Clinical Services





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THE HARDEST PART
OF PET OWNERSHIP

CHOOSING YOUR NEW PET



Dr Karlien Heyrman

BVM&S MRCVS
Vets4Pets Clinical Services Manager



Congratulations on deciding to welcome a new pet into your home. Your life is about to change in the best possible way – but, as with all big decisions, there's a lot to consider.

Everyone knows a pet can enrich your life, and can even provide health benefits such as helping to lower blood pressure and reduce anxiety. However, owning a pet is also a big responsibility, and whether it's a goldfish or a Great Dane that you are planning to add to your family, it is vital you understand the needs of the pet that you're thinking of getting.

As a pet owner you will have to comply with the 2006 Animal Welfare Act¹, which places a duty of care on people to meet the welfare needs of their animals. This includes providing a suitable and safe place for them to live, feeding them the right diet, allowing them to exhibit normal behaviours, providing them with an appropriate social group (housed with, or apart from other animals depending on their individual needs) and keeping them in good health by providing veterinary care.

There are lots of wonderful species to consider when choosing a pet and a mind-boggling array of different breeds, all with different care requirements, characteristics and needs. It can be a bit overwhelming making this important choice and we highly recommend doing your own research beforehand. The internet and books are useful, but don't forget you can also register with a veterinary practice before getting a pet. The veterinary team are an excellent source of information and will be delighted to help you with making the important decision of which pet to get.

¹ The Animal Welfare Act 2006 in England and Wales

SO WHAT ARE THE KEY THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A PET?

1 LIFESTYLE



For your future pet's benefit you need to be honest with yourself. Carefully consider your work-life balance and how many hours a day you are likely to be at home and able to spend time with your pet. A couple of rabbits, a snake or an independent cat might be happy to be left alone most of the day, but a dog, parrot or a more sociable cat will need company or they will become bored and frustrated. Dogs cannot be left alone all day with no company or access to a garden or outside space. Therefore, if you work full-time, make sure you consider your options about who can step in to offer some relief. A dog-walking service may be an option, or if you are very lucky, you might have a workplace that allows you to take your dog along with you.

You need to consider who else lives in your home: do you live on your own or have you got a busy family? Will this be your first pet or do you already have a menagerie? Most pets do enjoy interaction with us, especially if they have been handled from a young age, but the degree, and amount, of suitable interaction differs a lot between species.

Make sure you know whether your chosen pet is a sociable animal and requires a companion, or if they should be kept on their own. For example, cats are perfectly happy with their own company, whereas rabbits and guinea pigs are very social creatures and should always be housed with other members of their own species.

If you travel a lot, whether for business or pleasure, it's important to consider who will be looking after your pet while you are away. Kennel fees and pet sitter costs add up quickly and unfortunately rescue centres often see a spike in admissions of dogs and cats during the summer, when owners are planning to go on holiday and haven't made provisions for their pets.

Consider how settled you are and whether you have any big changes coming up which could have an impact on your lifestyle, such as starting a family or moving jobs or house. Some birds and reptiles can live for over 50 years and even the average fish can live up to ten years so they are a long-term commitment to look after.

2 TIME



Be honest with yourself about how much time you can spare. This doesn't just include time for walking and playing, but also training, grooming, feeding and cleaning.

Long-haired dogs, cats and rabbits will need frequent grooming. Whether long or short-haired, grooming also provides you with the opportunity to give your pet a check-up for any unusual lumps and bumps.

Pets that live in tanks, vivariums or cages may need less time day-to-day but they will need to be cleaned out regularly to stop them getting dirty or smelly.



3 THE HOME ENVIRONMENT



Consider how much space you have in your house and garden. Ideally all dogs should have access to a garden, or outside space, especially medium or large breeds.

Most cats enjoy access to the outdoors, but if there are lots of cats in the neighbourhood or you live near a busy road, then it may be safer for them to live inside. Cats can be kept indoors, but you will need to make sure they don't get bored and frustrated. You will have to provide for all their needs, including providing entertainment and stimulation through toys and play.

Rabbits love to run around and explore and should have access to a large run as well as a hutch. A hutch for two rabbits should be big enough to allow them to stand up on their back legs, stretch out fully and to make five full hops.

Even animals that are more suitable for a flat or small garden can take up more space than you think. If you are thinking of getting a reptile or fish make sure you research how big the vivarium or tank needs to be.



4 COST



Few people realise it, but getting a pet is almost always the cheapest part of owning one.

Some pets like reptiles and birds can have high set-up costs but then ongoing costs can be much lower.

If you are getting a dog or cat then costs can vary widely; a pedigree puppy or kitten from a reputable breeder can cost thousands, whilst rehoming an adult animal can be very cheap or even free.

Regardless of where you get them from, they will all cost a significant amount of money over their lifetime. Think about food costs, toys and accessories, insurance and routine veterinary care. If your pet gets ill then veterinary bills can quickly mount up, and if you haven't taken out insurance then you will need to find this money to fund the treatment at the time.

THE FIVE WELFARE NEEDS

More information on how to meet these five needs for different kinds of pets is available at www.pdsa.org.uk/taking-care-of-your-pet



A suitable living environment



To live with, or apart from, other animals as appropriate for the species



To be able to express normal behaviour



To be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease



A suitable diet, including fresh water

FINDING YOUR PERFECT PET

Dogs and puppies

When you have your heart set on getting a pet it can be tempting to respond to the first online advert that offers what you are looking for, but this is rarely the best plan.

Many pets, particularly puppies that are advertised online, have been illegally imported from the continent, or have been bred in puppy farms under very poor conditions. Animals bred in these establishments can have lifelong health and behavioural problems.

Puppies sourced in this way can come with little or no paperwork, so you may not even be buying the breed that you think you are.

The RSPCA has developed a Puppy Contract, which is a comprehensive document covering all the important points of getting a puppy, such as socialisation. You should ask the breeder if they will be completing it. Any reputable breeder should, at the very least be able to give you a thorough background on the puppy, including paperwork documenting veterinary care such as flea and worm treatment, vaccinations and microchipping.

As a bare minimum you should insist on seeing the puppy interact with its mother, and make sure you're buying a puppy that is at least eight weeks old. It's a good idea to see evidence of health checks for the mother too.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Have you seen the puppy interact with its mum?
- Does the puppy appear bright, lively and healthy?
- Is the breeder able to provide all of the information that you require?
- Is the breeder recommended by The Kennel Club?

BE SUSPICIOUS OF AN IMPORTED OR PUPPY-FARMED PUP IF:

- The mum isn't there (don't be fobbed off with excuses!)
- The puppy is very cheap (less than £350) or expensive (more than £2,000)
- The paperwork is incomplete, unsigned or foreign
- The seller offers to meet you halfway or to deliver the puppy to you

An illegally imported puppy may be carrying dangerous diseases and parasites including distemper or rabies, and could be seized from you by Trading Standards¹.

IF IN DOUBT, DO NOT BUY THE PUPPY!

¹ <http://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-a-cat-or-dog>



Cats and kittens

Unlike dogs, the majority of cats are non-pedigree or 'moggies', and there is much less of an issue with intensive, unethical breeding. You should, however, still apply the same precautions that are outlined for puppies – kittens should be active and lively with bright, clear eyes. One important difference is that a kitten's socialisation period is much earlier than in dogs. This is when they learn about the world, so it's important that they have been exposed to plenty of everyday sights and sounds whilst still with the breeder. If they have been kept in an isolated environment then this might have a lasting influence on their character and temperament.

Other species

Support Adoption for Pets is a charity that works together with Pets at Home, and rehomes many small pets through its network of 400 adoption centres across the UK. Their website also provides details of hundreds of pets of all species that are at rehoming centres throughout the country.

If you are getting a specialised pet like a reptile or fish then there are specialised retailers, as well as some very knowledgeable breeders who will be able to help you with acquiring the knowledge and equipment to successfully take care of your pet.

Whatever pet you choose, we hope you have a long, healthy and happy time together!

FURTHER READING

Dog and Cat Breeds

bit.ly/VetReportBreeds

The Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme

bit.ly/KennelClubPuppy

International Cat Care – Choosing a kitten

bit.ly/ICCKitten

RSPCA – Puppy Contract

bit.ly/RSPCAPuppyContract

Cat Lifestyles

bit.ly/VetReportCatLifestyles

Reptiles as pets

bit.ly/VetReportReptiles

Support Adoption for Pets

bit.ly/SupportAdoptionForPets

The Karlton Index - The Independent Dog Health Index
www.thekarltonindex.com

ADOPTING A DOG OR CAT

Whilst it's easy to set your heart on getting a puppy or kitten, there are thousands of animals looking for homes that will make wonderful pets. Guest author Peter Laurie Deputy Chief Executive at Battersea Dogs & Cats Home explains more.



Rescue centres are full of all breeds, shapes and sizes of dogs and cats, all with their own amazing personalities. Looking for a placid and relaxed cat to curl up on the sofa with you? What about an active and lively dog to be your running buddy? There are so many to choose from.

While puppies and kittens are adorable and need good homes as much as any other animal, it is also always worth considering adopting an older pet. Rescue centres often get these in when their owners die or have to go into care homes, and they make incredibly rewarding pets. They are perfect for those who don't have a great deal of time to train, as they've usually picked up good manners along the way. They've often passed the wild and destructive puppy or kitten phase and are content to live out a quiet retirement with a loving family.

Any reputable animal rescue should spend time with you working out what sort of home you can offer and what sort of pet would best suit your needs. At a rescue centre such as Battersea, you're getting the benefit of years of experience.

Our colleagues are experts at assessing and caring for our residents so you get an honest picture of what your new pet is like - what they love, what they don't like, and where they might need some extra training and guidance. All pets are also thoroughly assessed and carefully checked by a vet, so you have peace of mind, knowing your new dog or cat is in good health.

We'd always encourage people to rescue a pet from a shelter like Battersea, but if you're more set on buying a dog or cat, it's

important to spend time finding a reputable breeder - for dogs we'd recommend using one signed up to the Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme.

Don't respond to online listings or social media posts, because you can't guarantee they're from a reputable source - there's just not enough information to make a responsible choice.

If you do decide to rehome a rescue pet, you will have the added benefit of knowing that you're truly helping an animal's life. While there are perfectly legitimate and responsible breeders out there, animals in rescue centres are often there through no fault of their own. When you take home a pet from a shelter, you're giving them a second chance at life and helping spread the word about how important and wonderful it is to rehome a rescue animal.



YOU CAN CHANGE THEIR LIVES - AND YOU'LL PROBABLY FIND THEY CHANGE YOURS TOO

MISCONCEPTIONS AROUND BREEDS

While it's easy to fall for an adorable photograph on a website or social media, it's important to be aware that different breeds have very different needs. At Battersea, we see so many dogs come through our doors that we know what each breed requires and we will do a specialist match with anybody wishing to rehome a dog. But if you're adamant about going to a breeder, make sure you've done your research to ensure your lifestyle can support your pet.

There are many misconceptions around different breeds. Some good examples are...



TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT BATTERSEA DOGS & CATS HOME VISIT: BATTERSEA.ORG.UK

GREYHOUNDS

These sleek and sensitive ex-racers are often overlooked by people who believe they'd need a hugely active and athletic life. In reality, while they are bred to chase and sprint over short distances, they make fabulous family pets – most are couch potatoes at heart and are happy to curl up for a snooze for hours after a 20-minute burst of exercise. They are very affectionate, eager to please and gentle dogs.



SIBERIAN HUSKIES, MALAMUTES AND AKITAS

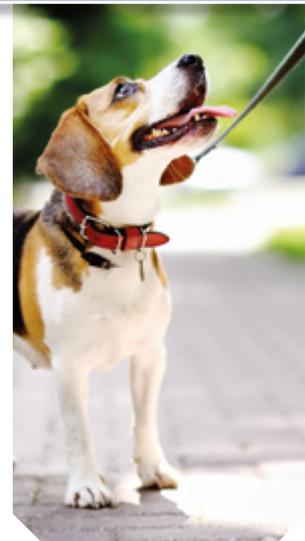
These beautiful dogs look like giant teddy bears and saw their popularity soar thanks to TV series like *Game of Thrones*. However, impulse purchases of these dogs mean that many are now languishing in rescue centres. These breeds are working dogs and independent by nature, and while they may look like teddy bears, they don't tend to enjoy being hugged and cuddled. As a result, they can get a reputation for being problematic, but many behaviours that may seem troubling, like lack of recall and hunting drive, are just common breed traits. In the right home, which has the time, space and experience, they are such rewarding and beautiful dogs who make incredibly loyal and fun friends.

CHIHUAHUAS

Small, dainty and cute, many people see a Chihuahua and rush to pick it up for a cuddle. These pooches may be small but they have big personalities and don't always take too kindly to being treated as so-called 'handbag dogs'. Battersea sees dozens of these dogs come in every year that have been treated like toys, making them undersocialised and nervous with handling. They may be tiny but they need to be treated and handled gently like any other dog - and like most dogs, they will give this love and respect back a thousandfold in the right home.

BEAGLES

Big eyes and floppy ears - Beagles are very cute dogs. However, they are incredibly intelligent and active dogs that need a great deal of mental and physical stimulation, and they tend to do better out in the countryside rather than the inner city. If they're not kept occupied and trained carefully, they can be vocal and destructive in the home, so they really need someone who is willing to put in the time to properly train and entertain them. In return, they are rewarding and loving pets.



MODERN VETERINARY CARE



Dr Huw Stacey

BVetMed DipAS(CABC) MRCVS
Vets4Pets Director of Clinical Services



There was a time, not so long ago, when all vets in practice were more or less the same. Watch an episode of *All Creatures Great and Small* and you'll see that James Herriot and his colleagues took care of every different species in every

different way. A typical day for a vet of that era might have included visits to farms and horse clients, clinics at the practice for dogs and cats, and even performing meat inspection work at the local abattoir. They would work long hours, and then be on call at night and weekends in case of emergencies.

You can still find what we now term 'mixed practices' all over the country, but veterinary medicine has advanced so much that it is very hard for a vet to have the right skills and equipment to provide a high standard of care in all circumstances. This means that most vets now focus on a smaller area of veterinary services; some work exclusively with companion animals (such as cats, dogs and rabbits) whilst others concentrate on large animals. The focus can be even more specific, with some vets only treating a single species such as horses, pigs or cats. Even within traditional mixed practices you will often find that there are separate teams of vets who only focus on one particular area.

The type of service offered can vary as well. In many towns and cities there are now veterinary emergency clinics that are only open at night when other veterinary practices are closed, and other vets who have no premises, but work solely by visiting the houses of pet owners. There are also referral centres, which are practices with specially trained vets that offer specific services like cardiology to a very high standard.

FIRST OPINION PRACTICES

Most veterinary practices in the UK are what we call first opinion practices, which have vets that take care of animals' day-to-day needs. Functioning in the same way as an NHS GP, you can contact them and make an appointment whenever you need one. Unlike the NHS, veterinary practices receive no government funding and as such will have to charge for providing their services. Waiting times to see a vet are almost unheard of, with most practices able to see even non-emergency cases on the same day or shortly after.

A typical Vets4Pets small animal practice can offer the following services:

- Preventative healthcare such as annual health checks and vaccinations
- Nurse clinics to support clients with new pets, as well as to aid dental care, weight loss and the management of long-term conditions such as osteoarthritis and diabetes
- General anaesthesia and sedation, which are essential to perform many procedures safely
- Surgery, both for elective procedures such as neutering, as well as to treat many other conditions
- Medicine for short-term conditions, such as infections, all the way through to lifelong conditions like skin allergies, heart disease and epilepsy
- Hospitalisation for short periods
- Dental care, ranging from a scale and polish through to surgical extractions
- Diagnostic imaging such as X-ray and ultrasound
- Laboratory tests on blood, urine, faeces and samples such as skin scrapings
- End-of-life care



Also, unlike a GP practice, first opinion veterinary practices are furnished with a wide array of equipment and facilities that enable them to offer a range of services more akin to a human cottage hospital (now termed a community hospital).

Practices will also send samples to external laboratories who can perform hundreds of different tests. Modern technology enables digital X-rays to be sent instantly to imaging specialists, who can review and report on the images the same day they are taken, a process that would previously have taken days or weeks.

Some first opinion vets have further training and qualifications that enable practices to offer additional services such as orthopaedic surgery, endoscopy, laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery, hydrotherapy and even CT scanning.

This extensive range of services and expertise enables first opinion veterinary practices to take care of almost every case that they are presented with. There are times, however, when cases would benefit from the expertise of a specialist vet and this is when your vet will suggest the possibility of arranging for your pet to be referred to an appropriate specialist.

FIRST OPINION PRACTICE TOUR

These pictures illustrate a typical day for the team at a busy Vets4Pets practice.



SPECIALIST CENTRES

Specialist vets undertake many years of further study in their area of interest to gain additional qualifications. Those qualified to the highest standards are recognised as specialists in their fields and are required to continue to study and periodically re-take their examinations to maintain specialist status.

Some specialist referral centres, such as Dick White Referrals near Newmarket offer many different specialist services, whilst others, such as The Eye Vet near Liverpool, focus solely on one specialism, in this case ophthalmology.



They can be equipped with extremely expensive equipment like MRI scanners, operating microscopes and even linear accelerators for radiotherapy of tumours.

These are some of the services that specialist centres can offer:



Anaesthesia: general anaesthesia, sedation, local anaesthesia and pain management



Cardiology: heart and circulation



Dermatology: skin



Internal medicine: liver, kidneys, gastrointestinal tract and other internal organs



Neurology: brain, spine and nervous system



Oncology: cancer



Ophthalmology: eyes



Orthopaedics: surgery of the bones and joints



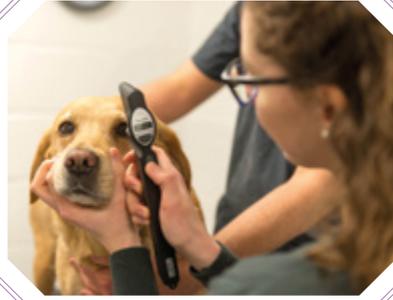
Diagnostic imaging: X-ray, ultrasound, CT and MRI



Soft-tissue surgery: surgery that doesn't involve the bones

SPECIALIST PRACTICE TOUR

These pictures show the highly-skilled teams in action in our Specialist Hospitals.



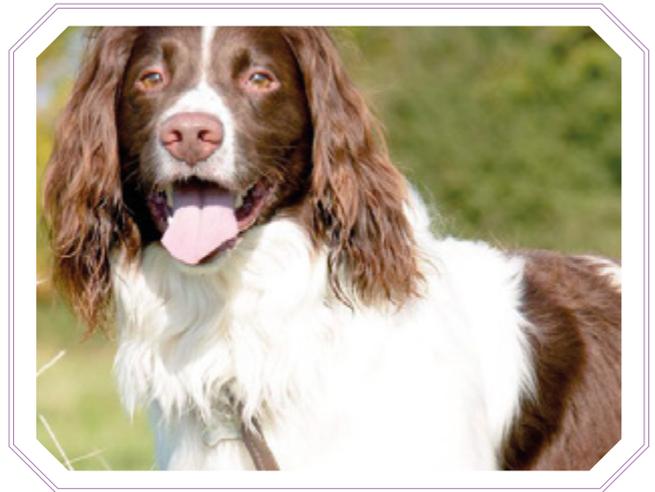
CASE STUDY 01

PIP'S STORY

Pip the Springer Spaniel just seemed a little off colour, until her owners were alarmed to discover that she was passing bright red urine. They rushed her to Vets4Pets Warrington Riverside, where vet Alex Campbell found she was pale, had an elevated temperature and a weak pulse.

Blood tests identified that she was anaemic, and there were other changes in her test results that made Alex suspect that Pip's immune system was destroying her own red blood cells. This is a very serious condition, and Alex recommended that Pip be referred to Northwest Veterinary Specialists (NWVS) where she would receive the highest standard of specialised medical care.

Pip was admitted to NWVS as an emergency case, and medicine specialist Ben Harris and the rest of the team started work on accurately diagnosing what was going on with Pip and what they could do to help her. They carried out further blood and urine tests, chest X-rays and an abdominal ultrasound. From these tests they diagnosed Evans Syndrome, which is a condition where the immune system destroys both red blood cells and platelets, which are essential for normal blood clotting function. A third of dogs with this condition don't recover, and it's important that it is diagnosed and treated as early as possible. Luckily for Pip this is exactly what happened due to the care and attention of her owners and vets.



PIP'S JOURNEY



FIRST VET VISIT

ALEX CAMPBELL

Qualifications:

BSc BVSc MRCVS

Vet School: Liverpool

Years of Study: 5

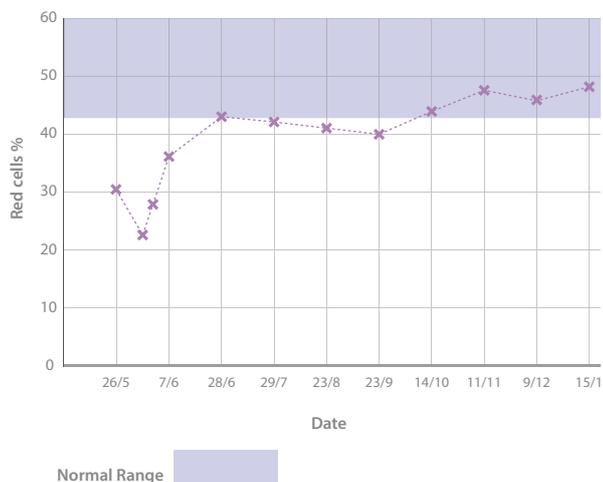
Years of Experience: 19

Special Skill: General Practice

Location: Vets4Pets Warrington Riverside



Red Blood Cell Count



Pip was started on a combination of drugs to suppress her immune system and put an end to the blood cell destruction. While in the hospital her red cell count initially declined and the team were poised to give a blood transfusion, but she then began to respond to the medication and Pip was able to be discharged home after several days, without needing a transfusion.

Over the next six months Pip was closely monitored by the NWVS team in conjunction with their colleagues at Vets4Pets. As her blood count improved and stabilised, the dosages of her medications were gradually reduced, until eventually she was able to stop the tablets altogether.

Nine months after this started, Pip had to call on the services of both Vets4Pets and NWVS once more, due to a persistent mucky discharge from her right nostril.

At NWVS, a CT scan of Pip's head revealed the destruction of the bony structures - known as turbinates - within her nasal cavity, and rhinoscopy (looking up the nose with a small camera) revealed the presence of a severe fungal infection called Aspergillosis.

Rachel Hattersley, a soft tissue surgeon at NWVS, took charge of caring for Pip. She was treated under anaesthetic by first soaking and flushing her nasal cavity with an antifungal solution, and then making a small hole in her skull to allow access to her frontal sinus, which is an open space in the front of the skull that connects with the nasal cavity.

This allowed an antifungal cream to be squirted through the hole to sit in the sinus. The cream was administered in this way under anaesthetic on four further occasions, a fortnight apart.

ASPERGILLOSIS IS A DIFFICULT INFECTION TO CLEAR, BUT THIS COURSE OF TREATMENT SEEMS TO HAVE DONE THE TRICK AND PIP IS NOW HEALTHY AND HAPPY ONCE MORE

BEN HARRIS

Qualifications:
MA VetMB CertSAM DipECVIM MRCVS

Vet School: Cambridge

Years of Study: 9

Years of Experience: 15

Special Skill: Internal Medicine

Location: Northwest Veterinary Specialists



RACHEL HATTERSLEY

Qualifications:
BVetMed DipECVS MRCVS

Vet School: RVC (London)

Years of Study: 9

Years of Experience: 14

Special Skill: Soft Tissue Surgery

Location: Northwest Veterinary Specialists



PIP RECEIVES ONGOING CARE FROM FIRST OPINION & SPECIALIST VETS

REFERRED TO SPECIALIST

CASE STUDY 02

RAMESES' STORY



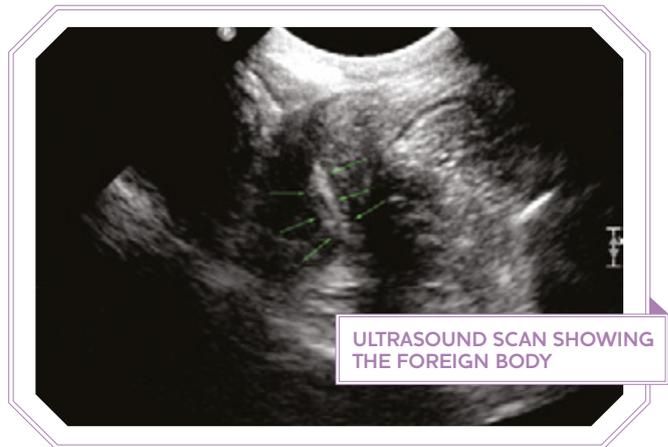
When Rameses' right eye started to swell, his owner's first thought was that he'd crashed in to his brother whilst charging around the garden.

The Manchester Terrier was X-rayed at an emergency clinic that night which showed that nothing was broken, but by the next day the anti-inflammatory medication he had been prescribed wasn't bringing the swelling down so his owner took him to his usual vets at Vets4Pets Ipswich.

There he was sedated and examined by vets **Sandra Braunig** and **Mary-Kate Woodrow**, and inside his mouth they found evidence that something had entered the tissues at the back of his mouth and was likely to be causing the swelling. Locating and removing foreign bodies is a challenging task at the best of times, but was made particularly difficult by the number of delicate structures in the area of the swelling. Recognising that the case needed specialist help, the Vets4Pets team advised that Rameses be referred to Dick White Referrals (DWR).

At DWR, Rameses' eyes and vision were first checked by **Ben Blacklock** and **Elena Fenollosa-Romero** of the ophthalmology team, before an ultrasound and MRI were performed to try and identify the cause of the swelling.

Two pieces of plant material were located and removed under ultrasound guidance, but the DWR team were suspicious that some of the foreign material was still present.



The next day a surgical team led by soft-tissue surgery specialist **Georga Karbe** performed a procedure called an orbitotomy. This means that part of the cheek bone is temporarily removed to allow access to the tissues immediately behind the eye (called the retrobulbar space). This area was carefully explored and flushed to remove any remaining plant materials, before the bone was replaced and the skin and muscle closed with sutures.

RAMESES TOOK ALL OF THIS IN HIS STRIDE, AND IN NO TIME WAS BACK TO HIS OLD SELF, AND CHARGING AROUND WITH HIS BROTHER ONCE MORE!

RAMESES' JOURNEY



FIRST VET VISIT

SANDRA BRAUNIG

Qualifications:
BVetMed MRCVS
Vet School: RVC (London)
Years of Study: 5
Years of Experience: 20
Special Skill:
General Practice
Location: Vets4Pets Ipswich



MARY-KATE WOODROW

Qualifications:
BVSc MRCVS
Vet School: Queensland, Australia
Years of Study: 5
Years of Experience: 3
Special Skill:
General Practice
Location: Vets4Pets Ipswich



REFERRED TO SPECIALIST

BEN BLACKLOCK

Qualifications: BVSc (Hons)
DipECVO MRCVS
Vet School: Bristol
Years of Study: 9
Years of Experience: 8
Special Skill: Ophthalmology
Location: Dick White Referrals



ELENA FENOLLOSA-ROMERO

Qualifications:
CertVOphthal MRCVS
Vet School: Zaragoza, Spain
Years of Study: 8
Years of Experience: 17
Special Skill: Ophthalmology
Location: Dick White Referrals



PETE MANTIS

Qualifications: DVM DipECVDI
FHEA MRCVS
Vet School: Thessaloniki, Greece
Years of Study: 9
Years of Experience: 23
Special Skill: Diagnostic Imaging
Location: Dick White Referrals



SOFT TISSUE SURGERY

GEORGA KARBE

Qualifications:
DVM PhD DACVS-SA MRCVS
Vet School: Berlin, Germany
Years of Study: 14
Years of Experience: 8
Special Skill: Soft Tissue Surgery
Location: Dick White Referrals



KATHERINE ROBSON

Qualifications:
BVSc CertAVP (VA) DECVAA MRCVS
Vet School: Liverpool
Years of Study: 9
Years of Experience: 10
Special Skill: Anaesthesia
Location: Dick White Referrals



RAMESES RECEIVES ONGOING CARE FROM FIRST OPINION & SPECIALIST VETS

WHY DENTAL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT



Dr Alex J Smithson

BVM&S BDS(Hons) CertEndo MRCVS
Dual-qualified Veterinary Surgeon & Human Dental Surgeon



If you've got a cat or dog you have probably heard about pets needing 'a dental'. Just imagine if we never brushed our teeth and you will understand why as many as 80% of cats and dogs over three years old require dental treatment¹.

As many pets live for longer, the risks of dental disease become ever greater and more serious.

But what does this generic title of 'a dental treatment' mean, what does the vet do and why do there often seem to be more problems than expected?

¹ Partridge B. (2016) Veterinary dentistry, Veterinary Business Journal, VBJ159.

WHY THINK ABOUT TEETH?

Dental disease in cats and dogs is very common, as unfortunately, the mouth and teeth are often ‘out of sight, out of mind’ and problems can therefore be easily missed. The consequences of this to our pets can be severe. Dental disease can cause considerable pain and discomfort and infections that start in the mouth can travel to other parts of the body. Dental disease can also mask the signs of abscesses and tumours in the mouth, meaning that they go undetected for longer than they might otherwise have done.

The good news is that with routine dental care and check-ups from you and your vet, many of these diseases can be identified early or even prevented all together. Diagnosing dental diseases at an early stage not only enables appropriate monitoring and treatment, but also avoids problems getting out of hand, when cures can become difficult and treatment costs can escalate.

Signs of a dental problem

Unfortunately pets with dental pain rarely show the signs of oral discomfort that we might expect, as refusing food or pawing at the face are typically only seen in very severe cases. The most common signs are subtle behavioural changes, which are easily overlooked or attributed to ageing.

Keep an eye out for the following:



Abnormal eating, chewing or toy play
e.g. favouring one side, avoiding chews or dropping food



Bruxism (teeth grinding)



Increased salivation (drooling)



Changes in behaviour: eating, drinking, sleeping, play, demeanour (such as being grumpy or clingy)



Halitosis (bad breath)



Red, puffy or bleeding gums



Tartar (yellow/brown deposits on the teeth)



Swellings, holes or pus around the face or inside the mouth



Broken, damaged, missing or discoloured teeth



EXAMINING A PET'S MOUTH

Pets will vary in their willingness to have their mouth examined, so you should always proceed gradually and with caution, especially if it is a new experience for your pet. They may be nervous or aggressive due to their demeanour, or if their mouth is painful.

It is always best to start the exercise of regularly checking your pet's mouth when they are still young, so it becomes a non-stressful part of their daily routine. Ultimately this examination should become an automatic part of your pet's oral hygiene regime and by providing daily tooth brushing, a health check and preventative treatment are combined.

This assessment will also, where possible, be performed by your veterinary surgeon or nurse during a consultation – either as part of a health check or specifically to investigate the mouth.

Because signs are often subtle, the majority of dental problems are picked up during a routine check, for example at the time of vaccination.

However, even with the best-behaved pets, an oral examination when they are conscious only shows us 'the tip of the iceberg', because much of the dental disease occurs below the gum line and is therefore hidden from direct visualisation. The part that you cannot see is almost always where the problem lies and is often bigger than it appears on the surface. This is why further investigation with your pet 'asleep' under general anaesthetic is often required.

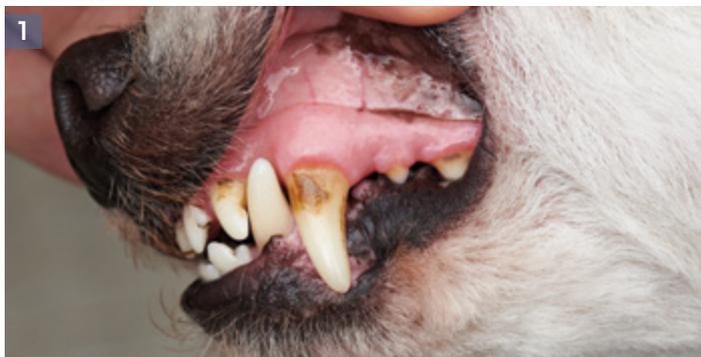
DAILY ORAL HYGIENE REGIME 1: HOW TO CHECK YOUR PET'S MOUTH



ALWAYS PROCEED WITH CAUTION IN PETS OF AN UNCERTAIN NATURE. ASK YOUR VET FOR GUIDANCE IF YOU ARE UNSURE ON HOW TO DO THIS AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR.

1 With the mouth closed to inspect teeth and gums:

- Gently, but firmly, draw back the lips and cheeks (this will depend on how elastic your pet's lips are)



2 With the mouth open (this might take a little practice) to check tongue, cheeks and roof of the mouth:

- Place your hand over your pet's muzzle with thumb and forefingers resting on the roof of the mouth immediately behind the upper canines ('fangs') to support the upper jaw
- Use your other hand to slowly pull the lower jaw downwards at the very front
- Avoid trapping the upper lips against the teeth or pulling the facial hair
- Make sure there is a good light source
- It is helpful to point your pet's head slightly upwards
- Ideally have an assistant to support or examine



DAILY ORAL HYGIENE REGIME 2: HOW TO BRUSH YOUR PET'S TEETH

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED:

- **Soft medium bristle tooth brush (avoid finger brushes but human tooth brushes are ok)**
- **Pet toothpaste (human toothpaste is not suitable)**

Achieving good brushing with co-operation from your pet requires patience, and may take several weeks to achieve. The process is the same for cats and dogs, but is often more challenging in cats. Try to make brushing teeth a part of your regular daily routine once or even twice a day.

You should never risk being injured, so use care and follow the advice below or get your vet or vet nurse to show you how to:

- 1 Allow your pet to taste the toothpaste first, as the flavour acts as a treat**
- 2 Gently close your pet's mouth, steadying their head with your palm beneath the chin**
- 3 Gently lift their lips to access the teeth at the side - initially for 1-2 seconds. Increase time daily to see and touch teeth. Lips move backwards easily to access back teeth**
- 4 Go at your pet's pace and give praise for good behaviour**
- 5 Stop if your pet becomes distressed or overexcited: ignore them then try again when they've calmed down**
- 6 Introduce paste on the toothbrush**
- 7 Use a gentle forward-back 'scrubbing' action on each tooth**
- 8 Start at the sides of the mouth then move to the front. Gradually increase the time and number of teeth brushed - with practice you can clean the outside surfaces of all teeth. Focus on the gum line, don't only brush the tips of the teeth**
- 9 Eventually you may be able to open the mouth and brush inside surfaces**
- 10 Try to ensure the interactions are calm and enjoyable for you and your pet**

NOTE: inflamed gums can bleed a little on brushing. It is not painful itself, so persist with the daily brushing to calm the gums. They should no longer bleed after 2-3 weeks of good brushing.

There is no substitute for daily tooth brushing, which is the only way to effectively remove plaque from below the gum line. However, in some cases brushing teeth may not be possible and your vet can recommend other measures such as plaque-reducing oral rinses, chews or dental diets. Beware of unsafe treats and toys such as sticks, hard toys, bones and antlers, which can all cause serious damage to the teeth and mouth.

WHEN SHOULD MY PET GO FOR ROUTINE DENTAL CHECKS?

Veterinary practices typically offer dental checks with either a vet or vet nurse. Timing between revisits depends on treatment performed, disease type and severity, and individual factors. Never wait for a check-up if you suspect a problem. In the same way that check-ups in humans vary, higher risk patients require monitoring more closely and the frequency of checks is greater.

Puppies and kittens should be checked at their vaccination examinations. If your vet requires more time to focus on a dental issue, they may advise another appointment, either with themselves or a veterinary nurse. A routine, adolescent check at 4-5 months of age is advised to identify any issues with the emerging permanent teeth.

After treatments such as extractions, a healing check should be performed a few days after the operation, and possibly again after around two weeks. Once healing is confirmed checks are typically:

LOW RISK: healthy mouth, owner performing daily brushing - 12 monthly

MODERATE RISK: some compromise to health or homecare - 3-6 monthly

HIGH RISK: significant compromise to health or homecare, active disease - 1-3 monthly



DAILY BRUSHING OF TEETH IS THE GOLD STANDARD FOR MAINTAINING ORAL HEALTH AND PREVENTING PERIODONTAL DISEASE

FULL ASSESSMENT UNDER GENERAL ANAESTHETIC

A full oral assessment requires general anaesthesia. Anaesthesia keeps your pet free of pain and fear during the dental procedure, whilst allowing the vet or nurse to fully inspect the teeth, take dental X-rays and remove plaque and tartar from the teeth and under the gums. Anyone who has visited the dentist will know that the mouth is a highly sensitive area, so in pets a general anaesthetic is needed to ensure they don't move. This also means that any treatments, such as tooth extractions or biopsies, can all be carried out at the same time.

Probe and chart

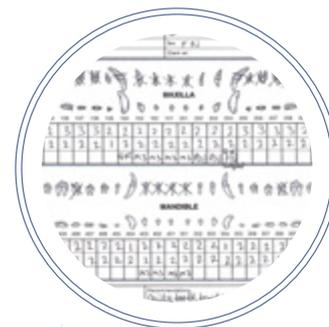
Once under general anaesthetic, the initial stage of detailed patient assessment is probing and charting. This is the veterinary equivalent of the routine assessment performed by your dentist at every visit. A dental chart is a map of the mouth, documenting abnormalities identified visually and using dental probes.



A periodontal probe inserted between the tooth and gum to check for attachment loss



In this dog's mouth, the supporting structures of the tooth have been damaged so much by dental disease that the junction between the roots can be accessed with a probe



Example of a completed dental chart: most charts have a key to aid appropriate indication of abnormalities present and treatment carried out

KEY DENTAL TERMINOLOGY

PLAQUE: a sticky, colourless film of bacteria. These bacteria cause further damage and disease called PERIODONTAL DISEASE

TARTAR: also known as calculus, this is the visible, hardened build-up of plaque on the teeth and usually looks yellow/brown

Dental X-rays

Intra-oral or dental X-rays are essential for a full diagnostic investigation; something we are very familiar with in human dentistry, but which is still under-utilised in our pets. Two-thirds of dental structures, and therefore much of the disease in pets, are found below the gum line. In one study¹, 50% of cats and dogs which had a dental problem on oral examination had additional problems which could only be seen on X-ray. Even in apparently healthy mouths, X-rays revealed important disease in more than one out of every three¹ cats and dogs.

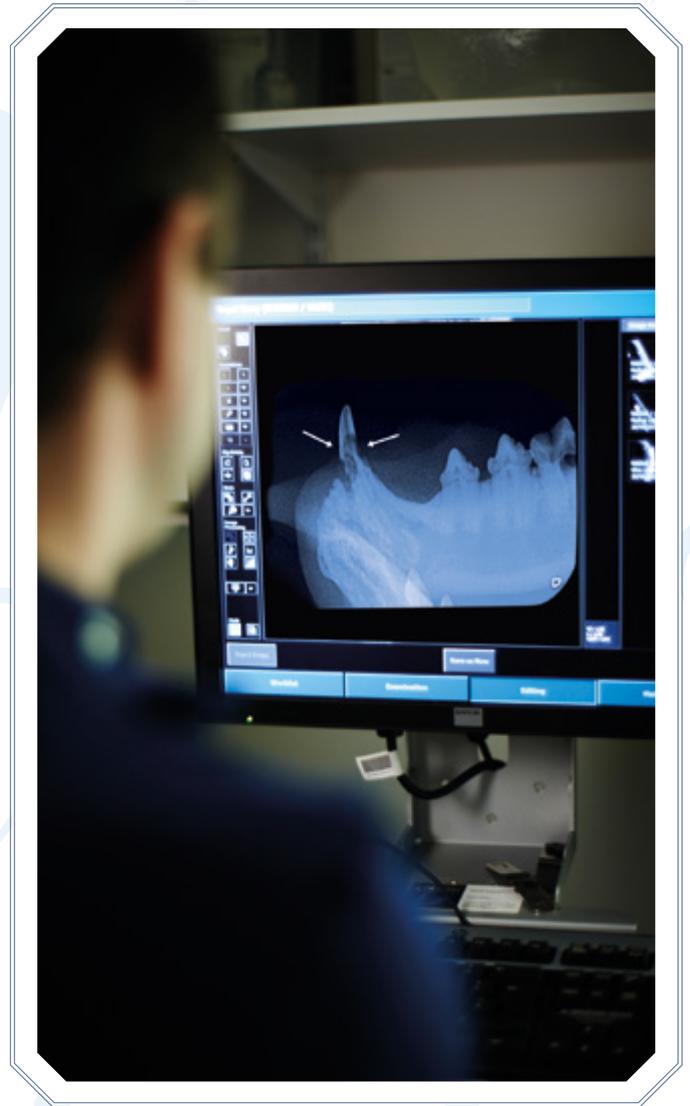
Omission of dental X-rays will result in problems being missed, especially in cats where a particular type of dental problem called 'resorptive lesions' is common.

Whilst dental X-rays do add time and cost to a procedure, they allow vets to reach a rapid, effective conclusion; often reducing the overall cost, as well as stress and suffering long-term for the pet.

Scale and polish

An ultrasonic scaler is used to remove plaque, tartar and bacteria from the teeth, as well as under the gums. This helps to eliminate potential sources of infection to the mouth and other organs and helps to protect pets from pain and tooth loss.

Polishing is done using a small motorized rubber cup along with an abrasive polishing compound which helps smooth the surface of the teeth, discouraging plaque and bacteria from adhering. It is vital that a scale and polish is followed up by diligent at-home care to slow down the progression of periodontal disease.



PERIODONTAL DISEASE: is a complex plaque-induced disease of the supporting structures of the teeth such as the gums, dental ligament and bone surrounding the teeth. The first stage is usually called gingivitis (inflammation of the gingiva or gums) and is reversible. Gingivitis can progress into periodontitis (attachment loss) which is the irreversible inflammation and destruction of the supporting dental tissues and leads to painful infections and tooth loss. Periodontal disease is categorised in different stages indicating the degree of severity. The stage of periodontal disease refers to a single tooth; a pet may have teeth that have different stages of periodontal disease. See the next page for different stages of periodontal disease

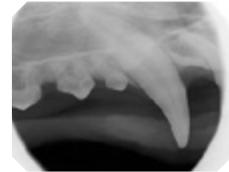
¹ Verstraete FJ, Kass PH, Terpak CH (1998a) Diagnostic value of full-mouth radiography in dogs. Am J Vet Res 59:686-91

THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF PERIODONTAL DISEASE

THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF PERIODONTAL DISEASE

STAGE 0: HEALTHY MOUTH

With clean white teeth and normal healthy gums.



STAGE 1: GINGIVITIS

The gum at the top of the teeth is inflamed and swollen due to plaque accumulation. Reversible with treatment.



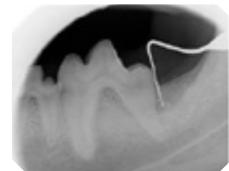
STAGE 2: EARLY PERIODONTITIS

Entire gum appears inflamed, swollen and starts to become detached from the tooth and bone creating pockets. Plaque hardens into tartar. Bone loss starts to be visible on x-ray. Mouth is painful and bad breath becomes noticeable. Professional treatment and at home dental care can prevent this from becoming irreversible.



STAGE 3: MODERATE PERIODONTITIS

The supporting structures of the tooth are being destroyed by infection and tartar causing receding gum and receding bone. Gums appear red, painful and bleed easily. Attachment loss is visible on x-ray and by probing. Bad breath is consistent. Tooth extractions may be required especially if at home dental care is not possible.



STAGE 4: ADVANCED PERIODONTITIS

Chronic bacterial infection has severely affected the gum, teeth and bone. Pus might be present and teeth become loose. Bacteria may be spreading throughout the body via the bloodstream and can damage the kidneys, liver and heart. It is likely that tooth extractions are required.

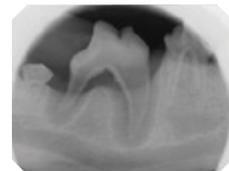
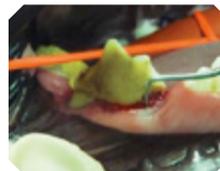


Image from Zoetis/Norman Johnson

Many common dental diseases can be treated by first opinion vets but difficult procedures, including some extractions and oral surgery, root canal treatment, restorations and orthodontic treatment, are not generally carried out in first opinion practices: These are usually referred to vets with specific qualifications and experience in the field. Advanced referral treatments offer advantages, most notably when it comes to preserving teeth, so always ask your vet for all the options available so you can make an informed decision.

Periodontal disease is the most common oral disease in cats and dogs and the main cause of early tooth loss.

It is progressive and doesn't just cause problems in the mouth. The bacteria associated with periodontal disease can also travel in the bloodstream to infect other parts of the body such as the heart, kidneys and liver. Unfortunately pets are often only treated when periodontal disease is advanced and multiple surgical tooth extractions are needed. This can be prevented by regular dental checks and daily tooth brushing. Even though periodontal disease is not reversible, diligent care at home and regular veterinary treatment can slow down the progression of the disease.

Other dental conditions include fractured or worn teeth, persistent deciduous ('milk') teeth, problems due to a misaligned jaw, impacted or overcrowded teeth and general trauma to the mouth area.

There are two common conditions which are almost exclusively seen in cats:

1. Gingivostomatitis is a very painful inflammatory condition of the gums and lining of the cheeks. This can be a very challenging condition to treat
2. Resorptive lesions are explained in more detail in Case Study 03 (see page 31)

FAQs

Does this mean I should get my pet to have a scale and polish every few months?

No. Whilst it is beneficial to remove the plaque biofilm which causes disease such as gingivitis and periodontitis, if the teeth aren't brushed daily afterwards, then the plaque and tartar will return rapidly. Scaling is useful for removing accumulated tartar and plaque from teeth which makes them easier to keep clean, but it is what is performed at home, on a daily basis, which really treats or prevents disease.

Some pets don't allow effective brushing, so in these cases alternatives such as a medicated mouth rinse may be needed. Unfortunately, disease is likely to progress more rapidly where brushing is limited and this is a vital factor for vets to consider, for example when assessing whether to extract compromised teeth or not.

How much will a dental cost?

Estimating treatment types, times and costs is fraught with difficulty. Unfortunately, the term 'dental' is vague and you should always check with your vet what it includes.

As the example above shows, thorough examination often reveals far more disease than was expected from conscious examination. Commonly, for every lesion noted on conscious examination, another five may be found, sometimes more. This means that the true extent of the treatment required only becomes apparent when the pet is anaesthetised.

It is generally best, especially in cases of advanced disease, to not tackle everything at once and spread the treatment over a number of procedures under anaesthetic on different days. An initial procedure allows for the essential probing, charting and X-rays. A scale and polish can also be performed where required, and the most painful and urgent problems such as abscesses or severely diseased teeth can be treated.

There may well be other abnormalities, however this initial investigation will provide the information to enable you and your vet to formulate a plan that takes into account all factors including the possibility of homecare. For example, the fate of a compromised tooth may be turned around if an effective homecare regime can be achieved, but if this is not the case then it may be best to remove it.

Will my insurance cover the cost?

This depends on your insurer and the policy you have for your pet. It pays to look at the small print, especially regarding dentistry, before taking out a policy, as the mouth is often an area with limited cover. Treatment for teeth damaged by accidental trauma, for example fractured or broken teeth, is commonly covered, however some policies cap the amount paid or exclude dental treatment altogether.



Looks quite clean, booked in for 'quick scale and polish...'



The dental chart shows severe, widespread disease. The crosses and lines on the chart denote teeth which are to be extracted - 24 teeth in total!

CASE STUDY 03 - EDITH'S STORY



EDITH WAS FOUND AS A STRAY CAT ABOUT SEVEN YEARS AGO AND ADOPTED BY AMY, A VETERINARY SURGEON AT VETS4PETS.

Amy had noticed a pink spot on one of Edith's canine teeth (these are the 'fangs') which she recognised as being a feline odontoclastic resorptive lesion (FORL), a type of dental disease often seen in cats. Edith was otherwise eating well, and seemed generally happy in herself.

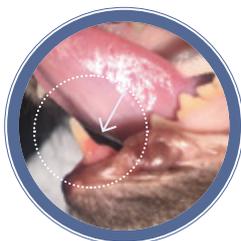
As you can see in the image (picture 1) a FORL can easily be mistaken for a bit of gum overgrowth or gingivitis.

Full mouth dental X-rays confirmed that the pink spot was a resorptive lesion (picture 2), but also revealed a second tooth was affected, with a resorptive lesion hiding under the gum line (picture 3).

Tooth resorption is a painful, progressive condition found in as many as one in three cats¹. Resorptive lesions are essentially holes in the teeth, making them fragile and prone to fracture. Over time the whole tooth can dissolve, including the roots. There are different types of resorptive lesions requiring different types of extraction depending on the state of the roots. The type of lesion can only be identified by dental X-ray.

Edith had both affected teeth removed and post-operative X-rays were performed to confirm no fragments of tooth were left behind.

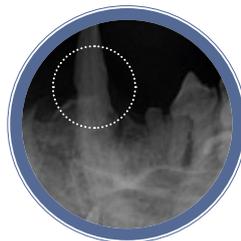
As a vet, Amy was aware of resorptive lesions in cats and how painful they are, but she was still pleasantly surprised at what a big improvement Edith showed after her dental surgery, both in terms of appetite as well as general demeanour.



Picture 1
Showing the affected canine



Picture 2
X-ray showing the affected canine (left) with a normal canine (right) as a comparison



Picture 3
This molar looked normal on visual examination, but notice how thin the junction between the crown and root appears on X-ray (arrow) compared to the other two teeth in the picture

¹ Bellows J (2009) Tooth resorption. In: Feline Dentistry. Ed J. Bellows. Wiley-Blackwell, Ames. PP 229-248.

CASE STUDY 04 - MOLLY'S STORY

MOLLY IS A TEN-YEAR OLD WHIPPET CROSS WITH A VERY SMELLY MOUTH.

Molly's owner was aware Molly's teeth weren't the best, but had been putting off a dental procedure. He had noticed her bad breath, but because she was still eating normally he assumed that her teeth surely couldn't be that bad?

Molly is a sighthound, which is a group of breeds that include whippets, lurchers and greyhounds and they are renowned for getting bad teeth. In general it tends to be the smaller dog breeds that usually develop more serious dental disease, but sighthounds are a bit of an exception.

When Molly had to be anaesthetised for a different procedure (to treat a wound on her back from running under barbed wire) her owner agreed for her to have dental treatment at the same time. It is not usually recommended to carry out a dental at the same time as another big surgical procedure, especially if this procedure is sterile, but the vet felt this was important for her welfare.

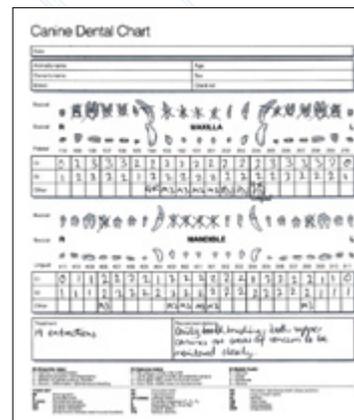
Molly had to have 19 teeth extracted, most of these were already loose and mobile due to the effects of periodontal disease. Her gums and the bone which would normally anchor the teeth in the mouth had been affected so badly that many tooth roots were visible. Her upper canines were not removed because with diligent tooth brushing further damage can be halted. Whilst Molly had previously not been too keen on having her mouth touched, this completely changed after her dental surgery and her owner now manages to brush her teeth daily.



As you can see in the picture Molly had severe periodontal disease with liquid pus sitting on her teeth



Picture of Molly at her ten day post-operative check. Note how well her gums have healed where a large molar with multiple roots has been surgically removed



Molly's dental chart showing the severity of periodontal disease. In total 19 teeth had to be extracted



ALABAMA ROT UPDATE

We've brought you information and updates on Alabama Rot since the first Vet Report in 2014. This year has seen two significant landmarks about the disease in the UK - the 100th confirmed case and the first conference to discuss and escalate research into the condition.

Alabama Rot is the commonly used name for idiopathic cutaneous and renal glomerular vasculopathy (CRGV) and was first recognised in the UK in 2012. Since the first case in the New Forest, the disease has spread to 29 counties across England, Scotland and Wales, and has also reached the Republic of Ireland.

Led by David Walker, the UK's leading expert on the condition, and his colleague Laura Holm, the first Alabama Rot conference was attended by a variety of leading clinicians, academics, microbiologists, epidemiologists and human medical experts.

Following the conference a steering committee was formed to help focus the enormous experience and knowledge, and to pursue funding and research.

This committee is co-ordinating efforts and, thanks to funding from New Forest Dog Owners Group (NFDOG) and Alabama Rot Research Fund (ARRF), has already commissioned an epidemiology project that will be performed by Kimene Analytics.

The research aims to identify possible risk factors for CRGV including age, breed and sex, the seasonality and geographical distribution of the disease, and develop a new questionnaire that will allow improved data collection.

Thankfully Alabama Rot is still very rare, but if a dog becomes affected, the best chance of recovery lies with early and intensive veterinary care, which has resulted in some dogs successfully recovering from the condition.

Any dog owners who are worried that their pet might have Alabama Rot should contact their veterinary practice immediately.

For more information including what signs to look out for, visit:
vets4pets.com/stop-alabama-rot.

GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF ALABAMA ROT¹

● Confirmed cases

- 18 Hampshire
- 12 Greater Manchester
- 10 Dorset
- 6 Surrey
- 5 Monmouthshire
- 5 Worcestershire
- 4 Cheshire
- 3 East Sussex
- 3 London
- 3 West Sussex
- 3 Wiltshire
- 2 Berkshire
- 2 County Durham
- 2 Kent
- 2 Lancashire
- 2 Nottinghamshire
- 2 Somerset
- 2 Staffordshire
- 2 West Yorkshire
- 1 Cornwall
- 1 Dumfries & Galloway
- 1 Northamptonshire
- 1 North Yorkshire
- 1 Shropshire
- 1 Wrexham

● New counties affected

- 4 Devon
- 1 Cumbria
- 1 Lincolnshire
- 1 Warwickshire



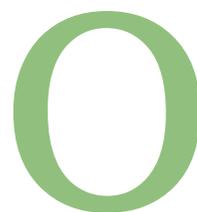
¹ Data supplied by Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists

BEHAVIOUR CHANGES IN OLDER PETS



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Behavioural Referrals Veterinary Practice



Old age is one of those inevitable facts of life and, within the field of human medicine, the importance of maximising the quality of life for people in their senior years has been recognised

for a long time. Thanks to advances in veterinary care and better nutrition, pets can now have longer and healthier lives than ever before, and cats and dogs living in to their late teens are no longer considered to be out of the ordinary.

It is important to remember that simply slowing down and becoming less active as a result of ageing is normal, but many older pets suffer from behavioural changes related to a degenerative brain disease called cognitive dysfunction.

In some cases, behavioural changes in old pets will noticeably resemble the signs of Alzheimer's disease in people.

SIMILARITIES TO ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Alzheimer's disease is described in terms of progressive stages, which range from the early stage, where there are no clinical signs, through to a condition referred to as 'mild cognitive impairment'. This may then progress to a clinical diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease based on cognitive and behavioural signs. When humans present with clinical signs of Alzheimer's disease, they are considered to be in a late stage of disease progression, and the success of clinical intervention at this time appears to be limited. The changes to the brain that are seen in animals with cognitive dysfunction are very similar to those found in humans with Alzheimer's disease.

Why are so many cases of canine and feline cognitive dysfunction left undiagnosed?

Cognitive dysfunction is a medical condition, but in most cases there is a lack of physical signs of the disease, and the signs that lead to accurate diagnosis are almost entirely behavioural. There are four main categories of presenting signs for cognitive dysfunction in pets:

- 1 **Disorientation**
- 2 **Changes in social and environmental interaction**
- 3 **Changes in sleep/wake cycle**
- 4 **Loss of previously conditioned behaviours such as housetraining**

On their own, each of these behavioural changes could be indicative of other diseases or of a purely behavioural condition, but when signs are present from a number of these categories, and most importantly from the first two, then a diagnosis of cognitive dysfunction should be considered a possibility.

The human dimension

Living with a pet with cognitive dysfunction can be difficult for owners too. Many of the signs of cognitive dysfunction are mistaken for inevitable consequences of growing old and owners may not be aware that anything can be done to change them. Owners will often make considerable changes to their own lifestyle in order to accommodate their pet's peculiar ways.

Quality of life is an important concept in judging the welfare of companion animals and, for many owners, the relationship between them and their pet is a significant indicator of how good life is. Behaviour is one of the major indicators of the strength of that relationship, as well as one of the most significant sources of strain upon it.

Alterations in sleep/wake cycles in both cats and dogs often take the largest toll on the humans in the household. But you are likely to put up with broken nights and significant sleep deprivation rather than approach the veterinary practice and run the risk of hearing that it is time to put your pet to sleep. A breakdown in house training can also put an enormous strain on the pet/owner relationship, and you may feel guilty about any negative feelings toward your pet and chastise yourself for not being more patient.



EXPLANATION

COGNITIVE:

Relating to the normal functioning of the brain

DYSFUNCTION:

When the function is not normal

Knowing when to include the vet

While changes in sleep patterns and breakdowns in housetraining may be seen as an inconvenience that has to be endured, changes in social interaction and signs of disorientation are often interpreted as indicators that your pet is suffering. It can be very distressing to see your pet looking confused, failing to respond to previously known verbal cues or startling when you enter the room as if they do not recognise you.

Considering euthanasia brings with it inevitable feelings of guilt, and the fact that human society still frowns on the concept of assisted dying increases the pressure that many owners feel to search for other options.

For many, the only way of justifying euthanasia in a veterinary context is as a means of stopping physical suffering, but emotional and mental suffering can be equally distressing for companion animals.

Making a decision about whether a pet has reached the end of their life is never easy, and compassionate discussion between owners and veterinary surgeons is needed to make a considered and informed decision. However, it is important not to delay contacting your veterinary practice if you suspect that your pet is showing signs of cognitive dysfunction, as intervention in this condition does need to start as early as possible. The most important thing is to approach your veterinary practice with your concerns and to realise that, while cognitive dysfunction cannot be reversed or cured, there are a number of approaches available which can slow down the progression of age-related brain changes.



RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF COGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION

There is a much better prognosis in terms of the level of improvement and the extension of good quality of life, if management strategies are introduced in the early stages of this disease. These crucial early stages of the disease are, however, hard to recognise, so here are some tips on how to spot them:

1 DISORIENTATION

Dogs and cats suffering from cognitive dysfunction will show a delay in the recognition of people, places and objects, and in some cases there may be no recognition at all. Obviously if your own pet fails to recognise you or other members of your family, it is likely that you will notice this quite quickly. However, failure to respond to people who call regularly at the house or to those that are met while out on daily exercise, may go unnoticed for quite some time. Monitoring the way in which your pet greets people at home and on walks, and how they react to familiar objects and situations can help to identify early changes.

2 CHANGES IN SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERACTION



One of the most distressing examples of this is an alteration in the social interaction between your dog and members of your immediate family, and a decrease in the enthusiasm of greeting behaviour. Together with a decrease in the time spent engaging in play and in affectionate interaction, this can signal the onset of cognitive dysfunction changes. When considering interactions with other dogs, it is not uncommon to see an increase in confrontational reactions in other dogs who appear to be confused or threatened by the unusual behaviour of the individual with cognitive dysfunction. Dogs suffering from cognitive dysfunction may also become more irritable and you may be aware of an increase in aggressive behavioural responses from your dog, together with a general decrease in the desire to interact and play with other dogs on walks.

For cats, alterations in social and environmental interactions can be more difficult to notice unless your pet has been particularly orientated toward human company. Elderly cats that spend a lot of time alone and do not readily engage in play are often assumed to be typically feline, and investigation of possible chronic pain or cognitive dysfunction is sadly overlooked. Regularly interacting with your cat and continuing to play with them throughout their adult life can help to sustain behaviours which can then be used to monitor potential deterioration in social interaction in old age.

3 CHANGES IN SLEEP/WAKE CYCLES

Alterations in sleep/wake cycles are common in cases of canine cognitive dysfunction, but unless your dog is disrupting your sleep this aspect may easily go unnoticed. If you do hear your dog whining or barking at night you are likely to respond by taking them out into the garden on the assumption that they need to go to the toilet. This might not be the case if your pet is suffering from cognitive dysfunction, and they may instead just wander aimlessly around the garden, which can be very frustrating for you.

Pacing is another common feature in these cases. You may notice that your dog shows signs of agitation and restlessness

at their usual bedtime, and they may pace and vocalise when you are making preparations to go to bed. The most common sign of cognitive dysfunction in cats is crying out loudly at night.

During the day, the sleep/wake cycle is also affected, and dogs and cats suffering from cognitive dysfunction will sleep for longer in the day. Once again this sign may easily be overlooked and considered to be a normal change in a dog or cat of advancing years.

4 LOSS OF PREVIOUSLY CONDITIONED BEHAVIOURS



This category of behavioural changes associated with cognitive dysfunction tends to be more noticeable in dogs, since fewer cat owners have actively trained their cats to respond to particular cues. The most common example in both species is the loss of previously reliable housetraining, but there are numerous other examples of learned behaviours which can be lost as a result of this condition.

Learned verbal cues such as 'sit' or 'stay' may no longer register with your dog, which may be misinterpreted as an increase in stubborn behaviour, a decrease in obedience or even a loss of hearing. When there is a breakdown in housetraining it can occur for two reasons. Firstly, the disorientation associated with cognitive dysfunction can lead to a situation where your dog sits at internal doors

when they want to go out into the garden and you may not recognise their need to go outside until it is too late. Staring at the hinged side of the door, rather than the handle side, has also been noted by owners and in these cases you may observe the peculiar behaviour but again not recognise it as a signal for needing access to outdoors.

Secondly, pets can lose their knowledge of which locations and surfaces are appropriate to toilet on. Dogs often start by not always toileting on grass as they have done in the past and instead begin making mistakes on the patio, flowerbeds and eventually on the carpeted floors in the house. In many cases the onset of this problem behaviour is gradual and it is only when your pet is toileting in a number of locations that you realise that these are not one-off accidents.

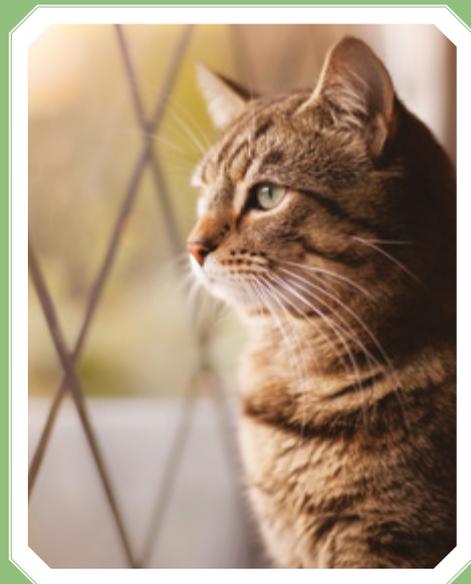
WHAT ELSE COULD CAUSE THESE SIGNS?

All of the behavioural changes associated with canine and feline cognitive dysfunction could be caused by a number of different medical conditions. Sensory deficits such as loss of sight or hearing need to be considered, particularly when signs of disorientation, changes in social interaction and loss of response to commands are present.

Many different conditions affecting the heart, brain and nervous system will need to be ruled out and the influence of pain on activity levels, social interaction and sleep patterns should be investigated. Many older pets have some degree of arthritis which can have a wide range of effects on their behaviour, such as making them less active, less interactive and may even cause aggression due to pain and discomfort.

Disorders of the digestive and urinary tracts will need to be investigated in cases where a breakdown in housetraining is the major presenting sign. Metabolic diseases and hormonal conditions such as diabetes and chronic kidney disease, which result in increased drinking and urinating, may also need to be considered.

These clinical considerations highlight the need for a medical approach to these cases, and a combination of clinical examination and additional tests, such as blood and urine tests, will be essential to enable your vet to build a complete picture of your pet's physical state of health. Only once this has been done can the behavioural investigation continue and management strategies for cognitive dysfunction be considered.



CASE STUDY 05 - HARVEY'S STORY

When his tearful owners brought Harvey the 15-year-old Border Terrier to the vet, it was because they thought it was going to be time to say goodbye to him.

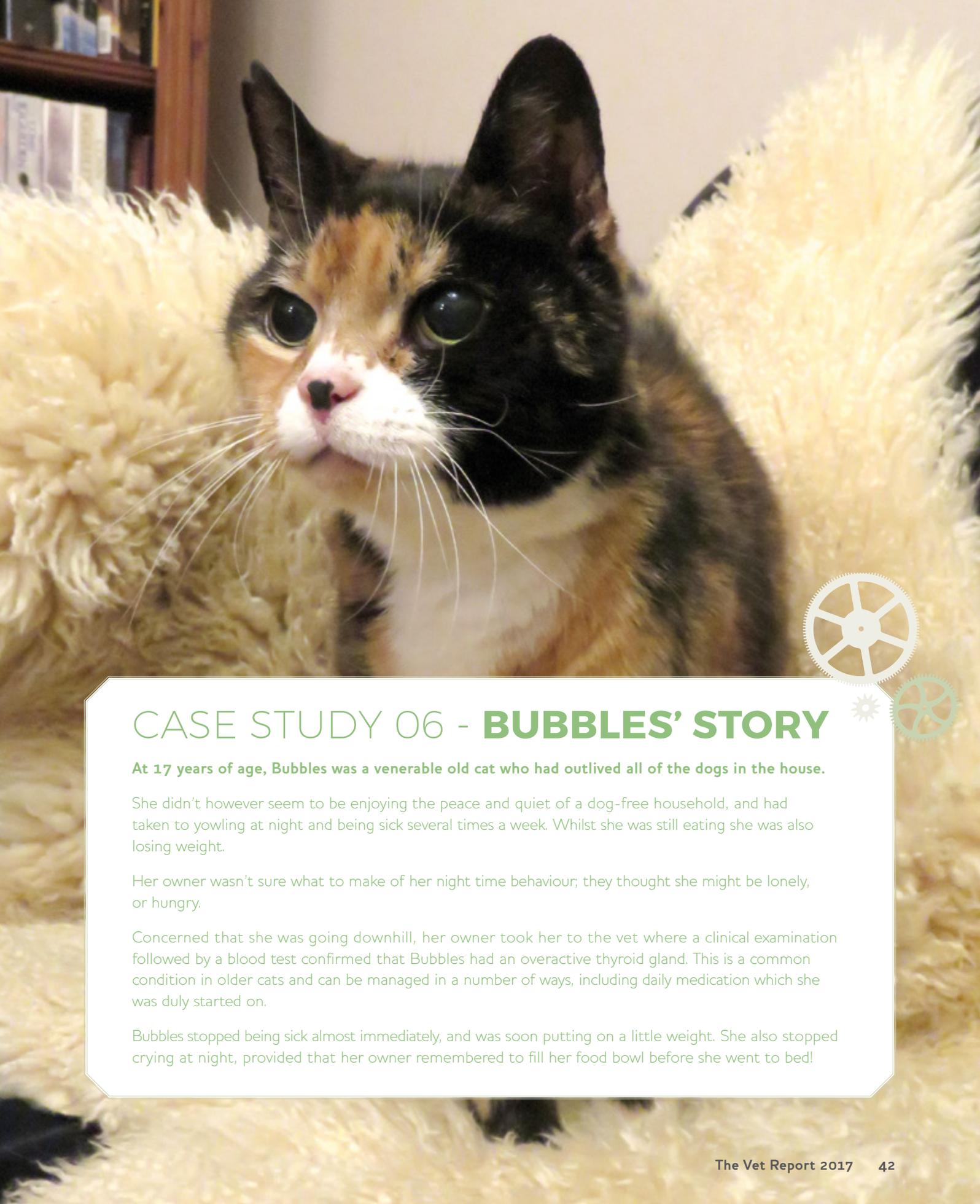
Harvey was increasingly yelping during the day and barking at night. He would stand and yip by the back door until he was let out, and then wander around the garden before toileting in the kitchen upon his return to the house.

His owners were going away on holiday in a few months, and didn't think they could leave him in the care of anybody with his behaviour as it was.

They were keen to try everything, so when their vet explained that the behavioural signs suggested cognitive dysfunction they readily agreed to see if Harvey could be helped. He was started on a combination of food supplements and drugs to improve his brain function, as well as an omega-3 fatty acid supplement and anti-inflammatory drugs to help his arthritis, which could also have been contributing to his behaviour and restlessness.

After a fortnight his owners reported that he seemed more comfortable, which gave them renewed hope and they continued with all of his treatments. Over time he became calmer at night, more interactive, and more like his old self.





CASE STUDY 06 - **BUBBLES' STORY**

At 17 years of age, Bubbles was a venerable old cat who had outlived all of the dogs in the house.

She didn't however seem to be enjoying the peace and quiet of a dog-free household, and had taken to yowling at night and being sick several times a week. Whilst she was still eating she was also losing weight.

Her owner wasn't sure what to make of her night time behaviour; they thought she might be lonely, or hungry.

Concerned that she was going downhill, her owner took her to the vet where a clinical examination followed by a blood test confirmed that Bubbles had an overactive thyroid gland. This is a common condition in older cats and can be managed in a number of ways, including daily medication which she was duly started on.

Bubbles stopped being sick almost immediately, and was soon putting on a little weight. She also stopped crying at night, provided that her owner remembered to fill her food bowl before she went to bed!

MANAGEMENT APPROACHES FOR CANINE COGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION

Although primarily behavioural in presentation, there can be no doubt that cognitive dysfunction is a medical condition.

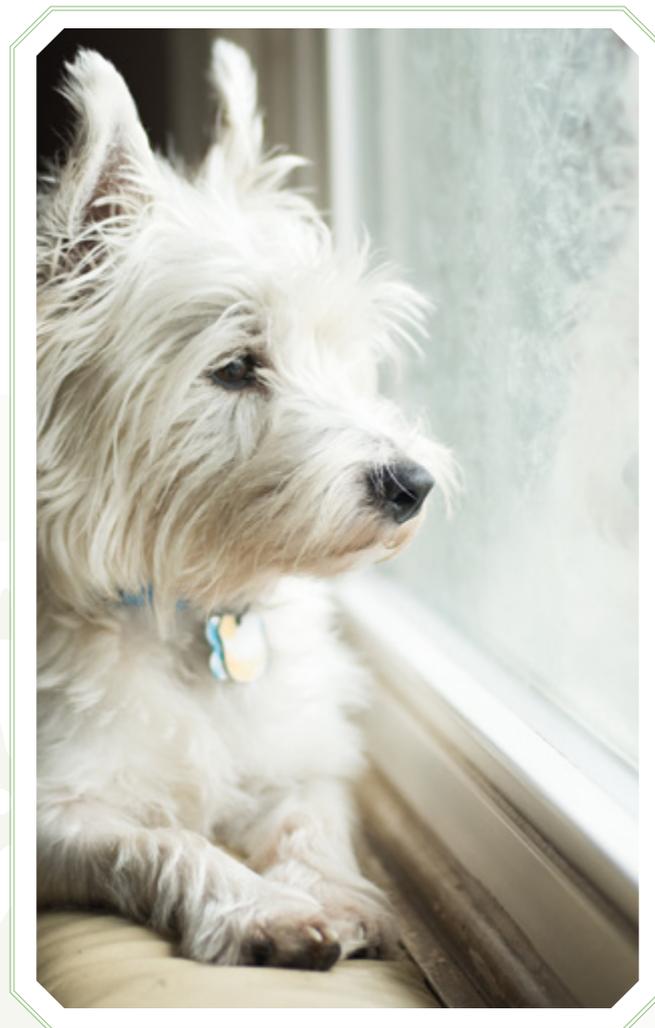
Medication can be used to help in the management of these cases, and the drugs that are used are targeted at the changes which are responsible for the condition. Medications that improve blood circulation to the brain can be beneficial, along with those that reduce damage to brain cells and improve communication within the brain.

Another approach, which has been shown to be beneficial when dealing with cognitive dysfunction, is the use of specific diets or nutritional supplements. The addition of antioxidants and essential fatty acids to the diet has been shown to help protect brain cells from further damage. There are a range of such products on the market and you should contact your veterinary surgeon to discuss all the options.

Providing behavioural support

To best manage this condition, behavioural therapy is needed alongside any medical regime. One of the consequences of age-related behavioural disorders is the loss of learned responses and this can be particularly relevant for dog owners. If your dog has cognitive dysfunction, they may lose their ability to perform simple tasks or respond to previously known verbal cues. Teaching dogs with cognitive dysfunction requires patience and understanding and the use of simple, unambiguous cues and clear reward signals is essential. Ideally rewards should be things that your dog particularly values and will be dependent on their breed and vary from individual to individual. For example, some dogs will value games, others social contact and others food. The use of a clicker, which has been previously associated with rewards, gives your pet a clear, unambiguous signal that will help to reinforce success.

Dogs will often need to be house-trained again and in many cases you may need to reintroduce some of the basic obedience cues. It is important that you begin this re-training as early as possible in order to avoid the establishment of unsuitable behaviours through inappropriate learning.



The effect of treating cognitive dysfunction on the pet/owner relationship

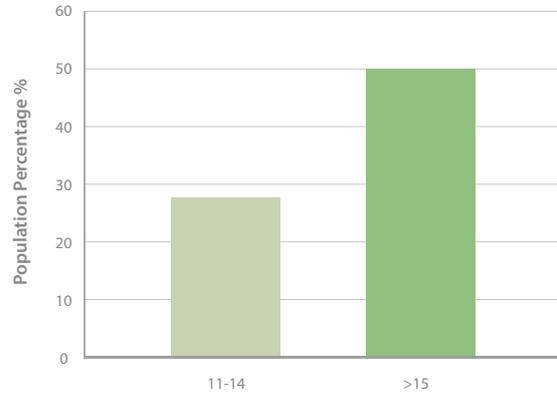
The onset of old age is an inevitable fact of life and, for many dogs and cats, their transition into the ranks of the geriatrics is smooth. However, this is not always the case, and when signs of disorientation and confusion begin, many owners find it hard to recognise their family friend. The changes in social interaction can make cognitive dysfunction a distressing condition for you as well as your pet, so it is important to remember the human element when dealing with this condition. Reporting the signs of cognitive dysfunction to your vet at the earliest opportunity will enable dogs and cats to receive appropriate veterinary care and maximise the benefits of therapy in terms of increased quality and duration of life.



HOW TO HELP YOUR CAT WITH COGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION

- Keep your pet fit and at the correct weight by feeding an appropriate diet. Always consult with your veterinary surgeon if you are concerned about your pet's weight
- Try to engage your cat in play - fishing toys and laser pointers can help to stimulate their interest
- Spend time every day stroking and gently grooming them
- Make sure that your cat has easily accessible and clean litter trays provided, in secluded, convenient locations
- Keep changes in their environment, such as bowl locations and furniture, to a minimum
- Older cats are less mobile so bringing their key resources closer together can also be a help

Prevalence of cognitive dysfunction with age in cats¹

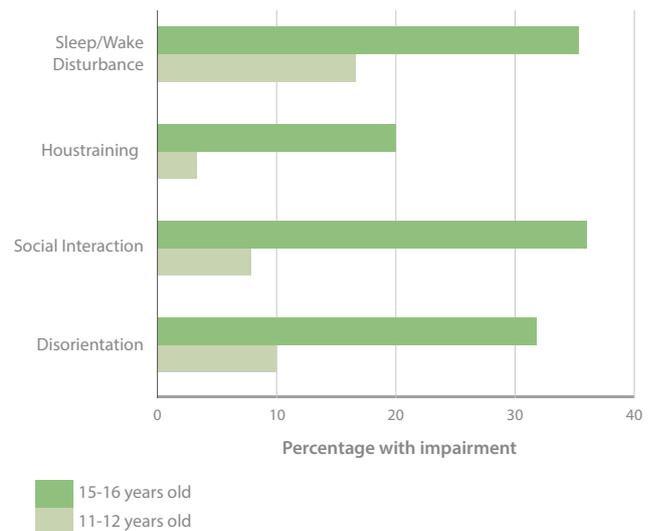


HOW TO HELP YOUR DOG WITH COGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION

- Keep your dog fit and at the correct weight by feeding an appropriate diet. Consult with your veterinary surgeon if you are concerned about your pet's weight
- Take your dog for three or four short walks a day, rather than one long one. This will show benefits both in terms of exercise and also mental stimulation
- Practice simple commands such as 'sit', 'stay', 'down' and 'come' and make sure to reinforce successful responses with rewards that your dog values e.g. petting, treats or play
- It can help to use strong unambiguous signals, such as a clicker or whistle, to reinforce behaviour. Ask your veterinary surgeon to recommend a trainer or behaviourist if you are unsure of how to do this
- Hearing deteriorates with age in dogs, so use exaggerated hand and arm signals with your commands, particularly those that are used at a distance such as 'come'
- If your dog has started house-soiling, help them to re-learn the rules by accompanying them outside frequently, for example after eating, sleeping and playing. Warmly praise and reward them if they do toilet outside. Never punish your dog if they do house-soil; this will only make matters worse

- Visual markers can also help combat disorientation. Placing a paper cross on the door leading to the garden can help dogs distinguish which door to sit at when they need to go outside
- Play recall games and ball games, using rewards and encouragement as necessary

Prevalence of cognitive dysfunction with age in dogs²



References: 1 Moffat KS & Landsberg GM (2003) An investigation of the prevalence of clinical signs of cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS) in cats. J Am Anim Hosp Assoc 39: 512

2 Neilson JC, Hart BL, Cliff KD & Ruehl WW (2001) Prevalence of behavioural changes associated with age-related cognitive impairments in dogs. J Am Vet Med Assoc 218: 1787-1791

THE HARDEST PART OF PET OWNERSHIP



Caroline Hewson

MVB PhD MRCVS
Small animal vet and researcher



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he end-of-life is unfortunately a reality of pet ownership. It involves death and grief, and as pets are usually considered as members of the

family, the loss is deeply felt. This article looks at some of that difficult territory, to help pet owners and the wider public understand and cope with their grief.

WHY WE GRIEVE FOR PETS

For people who don't own pets it can seem strange that people who do can grieve and feel a deep sense of loss when their pets die. However, for centuries people around the world have kept animals as companions and today 51% of UK households¹ do just that. We do it partly because as humans, we are social and therefore form strong bonds with those who give us a sense of comfort and security. These bonds are called attachment and are unconscious and automatic.

We become attached to pets because they accept us as we are. They are therefore more reliable companions than some humans can be. Caring for pets also adds meaning to our lives, especially at difficult times. When they die, our grief is as automatic as it is when a human dies. Many owners experience pet loss often, because most animal companions have much shorter lives than we do. However, this does not make the grief any less painful or easier, and an added difficulty is having to decide what's best for pets who are nearing the end of their lives.

“Haggis McBaggis came to me from the RSPCA as a tiny puppy because she was born with a heart defect and I ‘fostered’ her after her heart surgery. It was an immediate ‘foster fail’ as there was no way she was going to another home. From a tiny fluff ball she grew into a Collie cross German Shepherd. She was by my side when I got married - and when I got divorced! She really went through a lot with me. She had two major surgeries on her knees as she got older, and arthritis ended her career as a blood donor for poorly dogs.

One day when she was eleven and a half, I found her collapsed, and though I got her to the surgery we couldn't revive her. She died while we were preparing her for emergency surgery. She had suffered a massive internal bleed from an undiagnosed tumour. The team at work knew and loved her and even though they were upset, they supported me massively; it took me days to get over the shock. She'd been a massive part of my life and a real comfort during some very tough times. I took some time off work and when her ashes were returned in a casket, I decided to keep her with me on the top shelf of my office at work, where she had always been my companion, made me take my lunch break and always gave me a cuddle to make a hard day better. I still miss her even though I have two dogs that are awesome; she was my heart dog and I am a better vet for loving her.”

VET FROM VETS4PETS

“Many thanks for all your help with Chimney. Your kindness meant a lot and really helped my wife to get closure.”

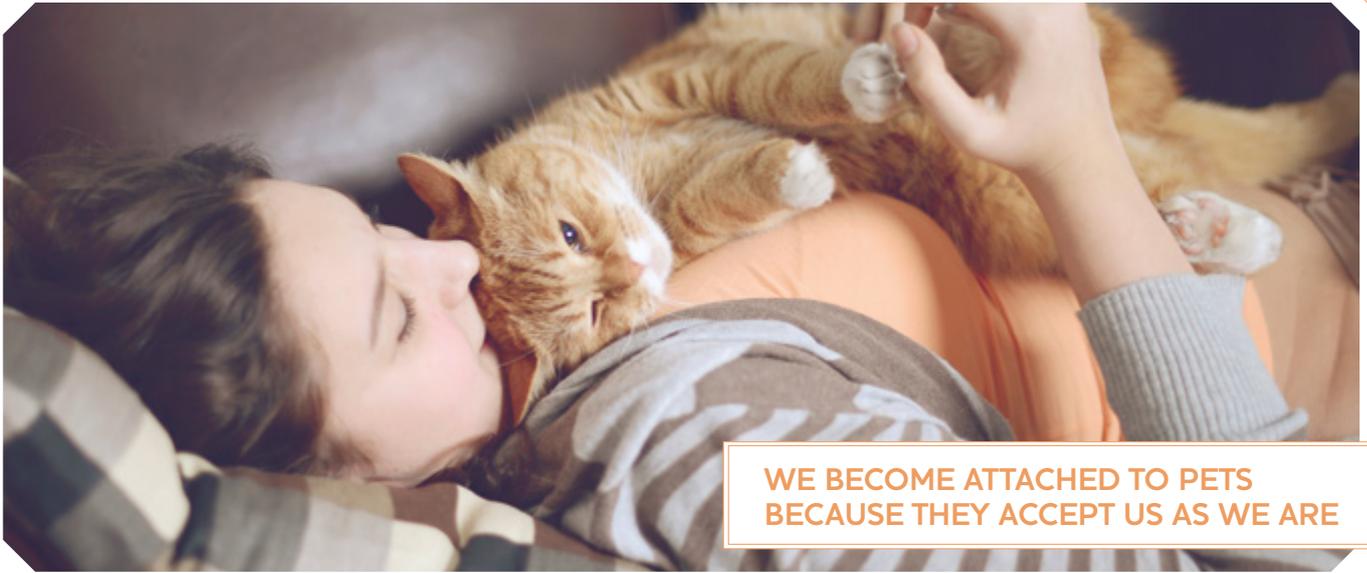
THANK YOU CARD RECEIVED BY VETS4PETS

“We lost our beloved Retriever Toby a year ago to mouth cancer. He was nearly 15. I have never made a harder decision in my life and couldn't sleep for weeks before the day he was put down, worrying about whether this was the right thing to do and the right time to do it. It brought back vivid memories of my father's death, as he had loved Toby so much and even saw him in intensive care before he died. It also made me think of my own children growing up and moving away, as Toby was effectively my ‘middle child’, 18 months younger than William and a year older than Alexander. Somehow Toby going away seemed to indicate the end of their childhood.”

- Anna.

COMMENT ON BBC RADIO 4 PROGRAMME TODAY, JULY 15 2013





**WE BECOME ATTACHED TO PETS
BECAUSE THEY ACCEPT US AS WE ARE**

DECIDING WHAT'S BEST AT END-OF-LIFE

As with any family member, we want our pets to have long, happy lives and die peacefully - ideally at home, in their sleep. Therefore, it can be heart-breaking for an owner to have to ask a vet to help their pet die instead. This process is described in veterinary terms as euthanasia, or being 'put down' or 'put to sleep' informally.

The question of euthanasia usually arises when pets age, because many develop chronic diseases or become very frail. At any age, pets may have serious accidents or develop terminal illnesses. In all cases, a natural death is rarely quick or gentle. Humans can prepare mentally for death, and often have round-the-clock supportive care while they are dying. This care ensures we have the least possible mental, physical and spiritual distress. However, that degree of care would be burdensome for many dying pets.

This matters because:

- 1 **Our pets have mental limits. They have thoughts, memories, and expectations about the near future. However, as far as we know, they cannot think about any of those. That is why they can accept us and not judge us. But it also means they cannot make sense of difficulties like we can, or cope by thinking about future plans or happy memories**
- 2 **We have an unwritten contract with our pets: in return for their companionship, we help them to have 'a life worth living'. That life includes having pleasures that matter to the individual animal. Intensive care at end-of-life may not often make a pet's life worth living**

If a pet has no possibility of a life worth living and is at risk of a distressing, natural death, assisted death is an act of mercy, and in advanced cases, is also a legal obligation under the Animal Welfare Act². However, none of these facts and logic make the euthanasia decision easy. It can take immense courage to choose euthanasia for a pet. Understandably, most owners dread this decision and worry about how they will know if the time has come.

1. The PDSA PAW Report 2017

2. Animal Welfare Act 2006, Chapter 45. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London.
Available at www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/

KNOWING IF 'IT'S TIME'

Traditionally, the vet told the owner it was time to help a pet to die. The owner was expected to be 'sensible' and either consent immediately or 'come back when it's time'. Most vets and their colleagues were (and are) very caring. However, the vet did not always say how the owner would know when 'it's time'. Consequently, some owners delayed going back, and their animals suffered, adding to the owner's grief later. Other owners felt rushed into the euthanasia decision and worried afterwards if it had been the right one.

Today, all that is changing - the euthanasia decision is shared and owners are more supported by their vet. Many vets and owners frame the discussions around the animal's quality of life. There are also quality of life questionnaires, which can help, but are all slightly different. Another guide is the A-B-C Yardstick¹, which is based on the idea that both the vet and owner want what's best for the pet, and each has expert knowledge of different aspects of that. The Yardstick offers a simple framework for combining their respective knowledge. Briefly:

- **The vet is the best person to tell if a pet is suffering or at high risk of suffering. Suffering does not only mean pain, other examples include breathlessness and extreme weakness. It is understandable to conclude that a pet 'can't be too bad' if he or she is still eating or being social. However, those are not always reliable guides, particularly for pets who are gradually declining. Many of them still eat, wag their tails etc., but are also suffering**

- **The vet also knows if treatment is possible, and what that would involve**
- **Owners know what makes life worth living for their pet. They know if their pet isn't themselves, and if treatment would be likely to burden the pet**
- **Even if treatment is not a burden, the owner and vet can work out together if the pet could go on to enjoy life again**

It is understandable for an owner to fear the worst when an older pet is unwell, so they often avoid going to the vet. However, the best thing for a pet, and for peace of mind, is to always get a vet's advice early on. Many problems are not life-threatening, and can be managed or cured with simple treatments.

Where problems are more serious, euthanasia is rarely needed immediately. There is usually some time - often days or weeks - to begin coming to terms with it, and plan for the time of loss.

THE EUTHANASIA PROCEDURE

The word euthanasia means 'good death' in Greek. Through euthanasia, vets help pets to have a 'good death', with their owners' informed consent. The vet gives the pet an overdose of anaesthetic, usually by injection. The drug causes the pet to fall deeply asleep and become unconscious. Then, because of the high dose, the vital centres of the brain shut down. This makes the pet's breathing and heart stop, and he or she dies. The entire event usually takes minutes or less. The vet and veterinary nurse pay close attention throughout, to ensure death has occurred.

Many people are understandably reluctant to be with their pet at euthanasia. However, for most pets, it is usually better if a family member is there. This is because:

- **Dogs are social animals and many see their owners as a 'secure base' when they are in a new situation. Therefore, it may be hard on some of them to die without their family nearby, especially if that occurs at the vet clinic**



This whole process is perhaps the hardest part of pet ownership, especially if the need for euthanasia is sudden or unexpected. It can bring many different emotions, including anger, sadness and relief. Today, most veterinary practices understand and try to support owners in different ways.

Examples include:

- **At-home, palliative care visits by the veterinary team or by local animal hospice vets. This approach closely supports families in facing their pet's death, and keeps their pets comfortable until euthanasia**
- **Further discussions before euthanasia, so owners can review their decision and be supported in planning for the event and afterwards**
- **Written information about grief and further support, so each owner can find the support that's right for them, before and after their bereavement**



ALL OF THESE APPROACHES CAN HELP OWNERS IN FACING PET LOSS AND COPING WITH THEIR GRIEF

- **Cats get their sense of security from their territory, so being at the vet clinic can be stressful for them too. Again, having a family member with them as they pass away is likely to be helpful**
- **For those reasons, euthanasia at home may often be best**

With support and planning from the veterinary team, most people say they are glad they stayed with their pet. Afterwards, there are different options for laying a pet's body to rest, including individual cremation and home burial. Grief can make it hard to make decisions, so it can help to plan in advance.

Aftercare services may vary locally. For example, some pet crematoria may not have a local garden of remembrance for receiving ashes. The veterinary practice will usually keep the pet's body while the owner decides. Unlike when a human dies, it is not feasible to treat a pet's body so it does not smell or decay. Therefore, practices typically keep pets' bodies in a freezer that is used only for that purpose.



COPING WITH GRIEF

Grief for pets is similar to grief for people: it unfolds in its own way and time. For many owners, it can take months. A recent survey of 1,011 cat owners by Cats Protection found that half of them expected euthanasia would make their grief worse¹. That can happen, due to things like:

- **Distressing memories of past euthanasias, especially if the veterinary team weren't supportive then, or the owner doubted the timing of the decision**
- **The pet being a last link to a deceased or absent family member**
- **Insensitivity from other people, who may accuse owners of over-reacting**
- **Difficult circumstances like unemployment or health problems, especially depression**

Today, greater understanding at veterinary practices, and support resources, are all helping owners to have more peace of mind during this distressing time.

Some people cope with grief by expressing their feelings to others. Other people cope by staying detached from their feelings and not speaking about their grief. Many people cope using a bit of both. However, because grief for pets is not supported in society, many bereaved owners fear being misunderstood - especially at work. They may try to hide their distress, seeming unaffected when the very opposite is true. Others withdraw and avoid socialising.

Greater public understanding would help many grieving owners. For example:

- **It is normal and natural if a grieving owner expresses their loss in ways similar to human mourning, such as:**
 - Having a ritual for the burial or remembrance of the deceased pet
 - Keeping mementoes, such as a clay paw-print, hair clippings or lead/collar
 - Having the sense of a continuing bond with the pet, and talking to or about him or her
- **Remarks like 'you can always get another one' and 'at least it was quick' are often deeply wounding - just as they would be if a child, parent or partner had died**

Despite any misunderstandings, many bereaved owners have enough social support, inner resources and external stability to cope with their grief. Many also find support through helplines, websites, books or professional counselling. If a bereaved owner is already facing depression, other bereavements or any other burden, it is often best to have professional support early on.

Some grieving owners have the added struggle of guilt: they may wish things had been different and feel they failed their pets for various reasons. Some of that is a natural part of grieving.

Support in euthanasia decision-making and planning can help give peace of mind. However, ongoing self-blame can wear down mental health and trigger depression. Talking with a pet loss helpline or professionally qualified counsellor early on can help a lot.

1. A survey of 1,011 current or previous cat owners was carried out by Atomik Research on behalf of Cats Protection in July 2016

IN CONCLUSION...

In the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, there is a glass bowl inscribed “**Because it is a word, we imagine we know.**” This sums up bereavement.

Every year, at least three million people in the UK become bereaved of their pets. We cannot imagine we know each one's grief, and no words can remove or prevent it. However, the growing understanding of pet loss by veterinary professionals and the wider public is starting to make a big difference.



FURTHER RESOURCES

This article gives an overview of the many different situations and questions pet owners can face. The resources below are a sample, and offer more information and guidance. Everyone's situation is different however, so for individual advice and support, we encourage readers to talk with their vet or healthcare professional, as appropriate.

Books

- Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet by Moira A. Allen. Dog Ear Publishing, 2007. Also E-book (Third edition), Creative Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2015
- Goodbye Mog by Judith Kerr. Harper Collins Children's Books, 2003
- Losing a Pet: Coping with the Death of Your Beloved Animal by Jane Matthews. Small Books, 2008
- Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine. Your Activity Book To Help When Someone Has Died by Diana Crossley. Hawthorn Press, 2010
- Your Pet's End-Of-Life: A Guide For When That Time Comes by Caroline Hewson. Publication date, February 2018 (www.thepetlossvet.com/books)

Websites

- Argus Institute, Colorado State University. Helping Children Through Pet Illness & Death.
<http://csu-cvmb.colostate.edu/vth/diagnostic-and-support/argus/Pages/involving-children.aspx>
- The Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria. 'Setting the standards for the respectful cremation and burial of companion animals.'
<http://appcc.org.uk/>
- Blue Cross For Pets. Pet Bereavement Support.
<https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-support>
- The Cinnamon Trust. 'The national charity for the elderly, the terminally ill and their pets.'
www.cinnamontrust.org.uk
- Compassion Understood. 'Advice & support for pet owners at their companions' end-of-life.'
www.compassionunderstood.com
- Dignified Departures. 'Compassionate pet care at life's end.'
www.dignified-departures.co.uk
- In Your Words. Cats Protection. Words of comfort from other owners.
www.cats.org.uk/what-we-do/grief-and-loss/grief-resources-support/grief-your-stories#page1
- International Association of Animal Hospice & Palliative Care.
www.iaahpc.org
- MIND. 'Support for anyone living with a mental health problem.'
www.mind.org.uk
- The Ralph Site. 'A not-for-profit website that provides support to pet carers around the loss of a beloved companion.'
www.theralphsite.com

Helplines

- The Cinnamon Trust. 'The national charity for the elderly, the terminally ill and their pets.'
Tel: 01736 757 900.
- MIND. 'Support for anyone living with a mental health problem.'
Tel: 0300 123 3393 | E-mail: info@mind.org.uk | Text: 86463.
- Paws To Listen, Cats Protection Pet Loss Support Helpline
Tel: 0800 024 94 94.
- The Pet Bereavement Support Service, Blue Cross Helpline. Emotional support by trained volunteers, for pet owners going through pet loss.
Tel: 0800 096 6606 | E-mail: pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk.
- Samaritans. 'A safe place to talk at any time and in your own way, about anything that's getting to you.'
Tel: 116 113.



