

# SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS VETERINARY CENTRE

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## OUR VETS

**Dr Bill Beresford** BVSc (Qld)

Special interests: Large animal practice especially cattle.

**Dr Charlie Carter** BVSc (Hons) (Syd)

Special interests: Cattle and small animal surgery.

**Dr Chris Watson** BVSc (Univ. Pretoria)

Special interests: soft tissue and orthopedic surgery.

**Dr Sarah Sutherland** BVSc BVBIol (Wagga)

Special interests: Small and large animal medicine and surgery.

**Dr Trent McCarthy** BVSc BVBIol (Wagga)

Special interests: Small and large animal medicine and surgery.

## OUR SUPPORT STAFF

**Barb, Catherine, Alice, Claire, Zoe, Steph, Candice, Kayleigh and Hayley**

Our staff are eager to help you with your appointments, food supplies and any other questions you may have about the care and welfare of your pet.

Our clinic has a full range of Royal Canin and Ivory Coat pet foods. We also stock locally made dog coats, Molly Mutt Beds, Fuzzyard dog beds and shampoos and Rogz collars and leads.

## CLINIC HOURS

The clinic can be contacted:

**Weekdays:** between 8:30am & 6:00pm

**Saturdays:** between 8:30am & 12:00noon

**Sundays:** now open 10:00 – 11:00am

**Consultations are by appointment**

## AFTER HOURS

After hours emergencies – at night, on weekends and public holidays – will be attended by the rostered Vet from this practice. Call our number and this will be diverted through to the duty vet on call. If we are attending another call we may not answer, but please leave a message and we will ring you back as soon as possible.

# YOUR VET



SPRING 2017

## Atopic dermatitis in dogs

Dogs also suffer from seasonal allergies; however the symptoms differ considerably between dogs and humans. In dogs, seasonal allergies cause a condition known as atopic dermatitis, or atopy.

The symptoms of atopy are usually first noticed at specific times of the year. However, as a dog matures, they can be affected year-round. Symptoms include itching, scratching and hair loss; skin on the groin or armpits may be red; dogs may sneeze, have runny eyes or rub their face on the floor; inflamed skin can develop secondary bacterial or fungal infections which can make the itch worse; they may have greasy fur and an unpleasant odor. It's common for dogs to lick their feet frequently and have recurring ear infections. Atopy can make life absolutely miserable for our canine companions.

Some breeds appear to be more prone to developing atopy than others. Many terrier breeds are susceptible, as are German Shepherds and Golden Retrievers. The condition is thought to be heritable, which means that the offspring of atopic dogs are more likely to also have atopy. Symptoms usually first appear before a dog is three years of age. Common triggers for atopic reactions include house dust mites, moulds and plants.

The cause of atopy in dogs is thought to be a defective skin barrier, which allows allergens to penetrate the skin and trigger an immune reaction. Diagnosis is based initially on the clinical signs and history, but it's important to rule out flea allergy dermatitis or food allergies; which can also cause similar symptoms. Elimination of these

potential causes involves the use of reliable flea control and feeding a hypoallergenic diet for eight to twelve weeks to see if skin inflammation and itching is reduced.

If a dog is diagnosed with atopy, then it's important that their owners are aware it is a chronic skin condition and relapses are common. There are a number of treatment options available.

Firstly, allergy testing can be done to identify which allergens are triggering a reaction. This information can be used to develop a de-sensitising injection, which trains the dog's body to tolerate the allergens. This means they are less likely to react to them. It's a slow process, but up to 80% of dogs will respond. However, some will still need medical management from time to time.

Another option is to treat an allergic dog so their body no longer reacts to the allergen. Traditionally this has involved medications such as antihistamines and corticosteroids, although newer medications have shown excellent results in reducing the itch in atopic pets.

Supportive treatment involves careful bathing to remove allergens from the skin, good nutrition to support the skin barrier and the use of antibiotics and antifungal medication to control secondary infection.

If your dog is itchy and distressed and you are always battling ear infections or getting cross at them for constantly chewing their feet, they may be atopic. There's no need for them to be uncomfortable. Please talk to us; we'll be able to develop a management plan to make them feel much better.

Take me away to complete our PUZZLE – check inside!

# A dog's treat is not always good to eat!

Dogs can eat some strange things, and each year the Veterinary Practice News magazine conducts a competition to discover the most unusual item swallowed by an animal. Entrants share x-rays of their pets showing such things as golf balls and fishing rods in their mouths and gastrointestinal tracts.

Veterinary surgeons from the UK pet charity People's Dispensary for Sick Animals were surveyed to find out the most common items that were swallowed by dogs. Bones were at the top of the list, with corn cobs and stones next. Other top ten items included babies' dummies and underwear.



Prevention is better than cure, however when it comes to stopping your dog from swallowing things other than their food, it's not always that easy. Observing three basic guidelines can help.

Firstly, keep things you don't want your dog to eat away from them – for example, put corn cobs left over from dinner straight into the bin, rather than leaving them on the kitchen bench with the dishes.

Secondly, watch your dog closely when in an unfamiliar environment. Parks and picnic areas are especially risky, as there may be chicken bones or other items accidentally left on the ground.

Lastly, teach your pooch to "leave it," so if they start to eat something inappropriate, they'll drop it on command. You'll need to be quick with this one, because dogs can be very speedy at gulping things down! Training your dog to drop things on command does take time, but it's a handy instruction for all dogs to learn.

Eating something inappropriate can make your dog unwell. Early symptoms can be non-specific; your pet will be lethargic and won't be keen for dinner. They can then develop vomiting and dehydration.

If you suspect they have swallowed something they shouldn't have, or if they're looking unwell or vomiting, it's important you

**1.** Keep items you don't want your dog to eat out of sight or out of reach.

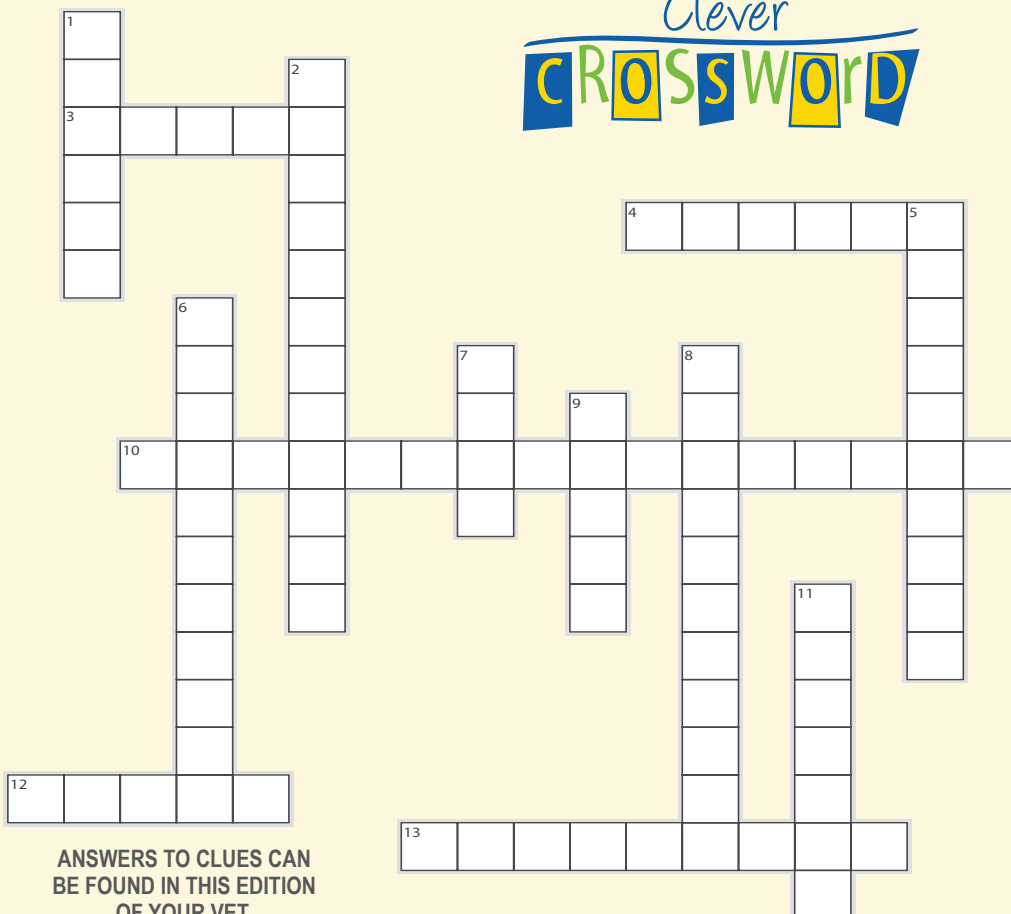
**2.** Watch your dog closely when in an unfamiliar environment.

**3.** Teach your pooch to "leave it," so if they start to eat something inappropriate, they'll drop it on command.

make an appointment for us to see them as soon as possible. A foreign body in the stomach or intestine can cause obstruction and damage the lining. The sooner it is removed, the quicker your pet will be back to their usual happy self.

When you visit us with your dog, we will check their vital signs and feel their tummy – sometimes foreign bodies can be felt. If we suspect an obstruction or partial obstruction, the next step is an x-ray to identify exactly where it is. The object can then be surgically removed under general anesthesia. Dogs usually recover very well from this procedure and are feeling better within a few days.

## Clever CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

3. Atopy symptoms usually first appear before a dog is how many years old?
4. Certain types of these plants are toxic to cats.
10. Canine parvovirus causes severe disease in this area of a dog.
12. According to a UK survey what was the most common item swallowed by dogs?
13. What is the best action an owner can take to protect cats and dogs from fatal diseases?

### DOWN

1. Spring and summer months are also known as another type of season.
2. The control of this is usually the primary reason for desexing your pet.
5. The axolotl is this type of amphibian which never reaches adult form.
6. What is the active ingredient in snail/rat bait that can be lethal to your dog?
7. A defective barrier of what is thought to be the cause of atopy in dogs.
8. A foreign body in the stomach or intestine can be the cause of this.
9. Atopic dermatitis is also known by this other name.
11. Another name for the Mexican walking fish.

ANSWERS TO CLUES CAN BE FOUND IN THIS EDITION OF YOUR VET.

SOLUTION IS ON THE BACK PAGE.



## Spring can bring more than expected!

One of our favourite parts of spring is that the days are getting longer, and there is more daylight to enjoy leisure activities when we get home from work.

This increase in sunlight also has an effect on our cats – a period of longer days following a period of shorter ones is a trigger for female cats to come into season and seek a mate. It is due to this trigger that the spring and summer months are known as “kitten season”.

Cats are very efficient breeders and those that are not desexed are quick to become pregnant. Female dogs are a little less prolific – they are in season twice yearly and during this time they bleed (which can be messy for those housed indoors). They are also very attractive to male dogs during this time, so you may have unwanted canine visitors trying to get into your yard.

The best way to prevent the issues of cats and dogs in season and the risk of unwanted pregnancies is to desex your pet.

Most animals spend one day in hospital for their desexing surgery; there is rarely a need to stay overnight. They are given a general anaesthetic just as we are when

we have surgery. In male dogs and cats, both testicles are removed. In females, the two ovaries and the uterus are taken out through an abdominal incision. Recovery is usually uncomplicated; in fact it can be hard to keep your pet quiet until their sutures are removed.

Apart from controlling their reproduction, there are health benefits associated with desexing dogs and cats.

The risk of developing breast cancer later in life is reduced if a female dog is desexed before her first season. Because her uterus is removed, she will never suffer from pyometron, a potentially fatal infection of the uterus. For male dogs, the chance of them developing a benign enlargement of the

prostate gland and testicular cancer are lower. Male cats and dogs are also less likely to wander in order to chase a mate if they are desexed, so they are less likely to become involved in a fight or be hit by a car.

If your pet isn't desexed yet, please feel free to phone us or come in and have a chat to us about the procedure. We can explain the anaesthesia and surgery your pet will undergo so your mind is at ease. We can also discuss the appropriate time for your dog or cat to have their surgery.



## Garden hazards

Be aware of how you could expose your pets to danger when gardening this spring.

Once the days (and nights) start getting warmer it's an ideal time to start planting flowers and vegetables, and many pets love to keep you company as you tend to your garden and outside jobs. Were you aware that looming in your garden there may be hidden dangers that can be harmful to your pets?

### TOXIC PLANTS

Some plants will cause an upset stomach if your pet eats the leaves or foliage. They may develop vomiting and diarrhea, but they will usually respond to treatment quickly. However, if you have cats, take special care to keep them away from certain species of lilies. There are no current concerns with belladonna lilies, canna lilies or lily of the valley, but members of the liliaceae and hemerocallis genera which include Easter lilies, Christmas lilies, tiger lilies and day lilies are toxic to cats. Should a cat chew on these plants they can develop acute kidney failure, which is often fatal. If you have lilies in your garden, try to reduce the risk of this happening by creating a natural barrier to the plants and/or supervising them outdoors.

### PESTICIDES

Be mindful of a product's ingredients when deciding what pesticides and fertilisers you

choose to use in your garden, to control bugs and encourage plant growth. Check the label carefully so you know how long after use, your pets should be kept away from the garden. If you're unsure, a phone call to the customer support line is usually very helpful. Alternatively, you may find a non-toxic product that keeps pests under control but still allows your pets to enjoy their back yard.

### SNAIL AND RAT BAIT

Snail and slug bait can be lethal to your dog if ingested, because of the active ingredient metaldehyde. Some products claim to be pet safe because they contain a bittering agent that tastes bad, but that doesn't deter all animals.

Dogs and cats can develop bleeding disorders and experience convulsions if they eat rat or mouse bait; or even if they eat a poisoned rodent. If you have a rodent problem in your garden, don't rely on bait – place traps to catch the vermin instead.

If you're concerned that your pet may have been exposed to a toxin in your garden, please don't hesitate to call us. We can advise you on what steps to take next and if necessary, arrange to have your furry friend treated as soon as possible.

## Wot a lotta axolotl!

The axolotl or 'Mexican walking fish' is a rather strange looking amphibian that makes a fascinating pet. Most amphibians, such as frogs, have a life cycle that involves the development of eggs into a larval stage (tadpole), then on to adult form (frog) which can survive on land and in the water.

The axolotl is unusual in that it is a type of salamander which never reaches its adult form, and consequently spends all its life in water. Despite being a larval form, the axolotl still reaches adulthood and is able to reproduce.

Axolotls range in size from 18-35cm and come in a variety of colours including white, grey, black, brown and a golden color. They have fluffy, exuberant external gills through which they breathe. They do have very basic lungs and can occasionally be seen rising to the water's surface and taking a gulp of air. Their amazing ability to regenerate limbs or tails (often after they have been bitten off by a fellow axolotl) has made them the subjects of much laboratory investigation.

Axolotls have many specific housing and feeding requirements. Their water temperature should ideally be between 14° and 20°C, with minimal variation. Temperatures greater than 24°C cause stress and predispose the axolotl to disease, whilst temperatures below 14°C slow metabolism and reduce their appetite. The base of the tank should be covered with either fine sand or pebbles larger than 2cm, as axolotls are notorious for eating normal aquarium gravel, which can cause gut obstructions. Water filtration systems need to be appropriate for the size of the tank, as both over and under filtration can cause problems. Axolotls can be fed a combination of live and pelleted foods but prefer food that sinks rather than floats on the surface of the water.

As with any pet ownership, it pays to investigate the specific needs of an axolotl before introducing one into your home. Many problems are related to poor husbandry, so seek help in setting up your axolotl's tank and hopefully it will live a long and happy life.



# Protect your pet from deadly viruses

Highly contagious viruses can be devastating for our cats and dogs if preventative measures are not taken.

Canine parvovirus (commonly referred as parvo), is a deadly illness that has been making headlines in the media recently. Parvo is a highly contagious infection that causes severe gastrointestinal disease and can spread quickly throughout a population of dogs – particularly puppies.

Symptoms are most severe in puppies or unvaccinated adult dogs and include loss of appetite, lethargy, vomiting and foul smelling, bloody diarrhea. Many unvaccinated dogs that become infected won't live despite treatment. Not only is the virus highly contagious, it is also very resilient; surviving in the environment for several months without the need for a living host.

More recently, a new strain of the virus known as parvovirus 2c, is affecting dogs throughout Australia; and dog owners around the country are rightly concerned. Parvovirus 2c has a slightly different protein structure to the more common 2b strain, although symptoms of illness are similar. Infections have occurred in vaccinated dogs which have displayed mild symptoms, however unvaccinated puppies are still at great risk of serious illness. Treatment of parvovirus infection irrespective of the strain includes intravenous fluids, anti-vomiting medication, antibiotics and intensive nursing.

Similarly, our feline friends can also suffer from a viral infection known as feline panleukopaenia. There have been recent outbreaks of this illness in several states that have resulted in the deaths of many cats and kittens. Symptoms are similar to



canine parvovirus, and once it takes hold can very quickly become fatal; with young kittens being most at risk. It is thought that the canine parvovirus developed from a mutation in the feline panleukopaenia virus.

You can protect your much-loved cats and dogs from these potentially fatal diseases. For dogs, the parvovirus vaccination available in Australia will protect against both the 2b and 2c strains. Puppies need a series of up to three vaccinations, depending on age and adult dogs can be protected with booster vaccinations at specific intervals. A similar vaccination programme is available to protect cats against feline panleukopaenia virus.

Has your furry family member been vaccinated against parvovirus or panleukopaenia? If you're unsure or you'd like to know more about protecting your pet please ask us. Vaccination is the best method we have for defending our pets against these deadly and highly contagious viruses.



## PRACTICE UPDATE

### ELIMINATION ISSUES IN CATS

*(or feline urination/defecation problems)*

Litter tray issues and inappropriate elimination in the house are a common problem for cat owners. There are numerous reasons as to why these problems occur. Causes include problems accessing the litter area, the type of litter used, pain, illness and behavioural considerations.

All households should have at least one litter tray per cat PLUS one. For example in a multi-cat household with two cats there should be at least 3 litter trays available; and these should be in a variety of locations (not lined up next to each other) and in a private location. The litter tray/s should also be away from food and water resources. The substrate in the litter tray should be deep, as cats like to dig a hole and 'bury' their faeces. This behaviour helps cats avoid environmental contamination with faeces and to decrease the incidence of disease spread.

The litter tray also needs to be easily accessible. Senior cats may struggle to step over the edge of the tray if they are struggling with osteoarthritic disease which is causing pain or weakness. If a cat is anxious due to the presence of other cats (in or outside the house) or loud noises, they may be reluctant to use the allocated tray.

If there are problems with cats using the litter, a variety of substrates should be provided to give the cat choice (e.g., crystals, recycled paper, sawdust). The litter tray needs to be emptied and cleaned daily (or more frequently) as cats are fastidiously clean and do not like to use a dirty litter tray.

If you have tried all of the above recommendations and your cat is still toileting inappropriately, it is best to book in for a consultation with your veterinarian for a full health check. Often a blood and urine test is recommended to rule out any medical conditions. Urinary tract infections can cause pain when using the litter box, which can result in an aversion to the tray or the substrate itself.

The physical examination may also reveal any sources of pain which can be treated, or any underlying diseases such as diabetes which can cause an increased water intake and thus frequent toileting resulting in a very wet tray. Urinary diets are available to help cats with recurrent urinary issues. For those cats with anxious tendencies, pheromones such as Feliway can help the cat feel more relaxed. Other medications, behavioural plans and environmental enrichment opportunities are also available from your veterinarian.

ACROSS: 3. THREE 4. LILIES 10. GASTROINTESTINAL 12. BONES  
DOWN: 1. KITTEN 2. REPRODUCTION 5. SALAMANDER 6. METALDEHYDE  
7. SKIN 8. OBSTRUCTION 9. ATOPY 11. AXOLOTL  
13. VACCINATE

**CROSSWORD SOLUTION**

To contact your vet - keep me in a handy place at home