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YOUR  
VET



SPRING 2016

## SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS VETERINARY CENTRE

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### VISIT OUR WEBSITE

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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: Small animal surgery.

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

Special interests: soft tissue and orthopedic surgery.

**Dr Alex Johnston** BVSc (Syd)

Special interests: Small animal medicine especially feline medicine.

**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, Sandy, Bethany, Zoe and Steph**

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 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 between 8.30am and 6.00pm weekdays, and between 8.30am and 12.00noon on Saturdays.

Sundays - now open 10-11am.

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.

## A DOG'S TAIL

Dogs are known for their tails but many owners are unaware that these furry masses of bone serve multiple purposes.

The canine tail usually consists of between six and twenty-three highly mobile vertebrae. These vertebrae are encased in muscles that make the various segments, especially the tip, capable of finely graded movements that lift the tail, move it from side to side, or draw it down between the hind legs.

A dog's tail is mostly used as counterbalance when the dog is carrying out complicated movements such as leaping, walking along narrow structures or climbing. Dogs that run at great speeds often have thin tails that are very long in proportion to the rest of their body. Some dogs use their tails as rudders when swimming and those bred for swimming frequently have tails that are thick, strong and very flexible, which helps them to move easily through the water and make quick turns. Other breeds like Nordic group dogs can even use their tails for insulation and have bushy or plumed tails with long dense fur for this purpose. When lying down they may even pull their tails over their faces to keep out the cold.

Over time, the canine tail had also adapted itself to playing a vital role in communication. Dogs express happiness, aggression, stress and many other emotions with their tail. When a dog holds their tail high and wags it back and forth, they are usually feeling pretty good. When they are interested in something, their tail may be horizontal to the ground but if it moves from horizontal to upright and becomes rigid, they could be feeling threatened. A dog that is worried or insecure may have a tail that is low and wagging while a tucked tail indicates the dog is frightened or submissive.

Dogs also wag their tails to spread their natural scent from their anal glands. Each dog has a scent that's as unique to them as fingerprints are to us. An "alpha" or dominant dog that carries their tail high will release more of their scent. Likewise, a frightened dog will hold their tail between their legs to keep others from sniffing them.

So, if the tail plays such an important role what happens if it's removed? The docking of dogs' tails is a practice which has been carried out for centuries in order to avoid tail damage, for hygiene and other reasons. Today there are over fifty traditionally docked breeds which are recognised by various kennel clubs. But for some breeds it was proposed primarily to improve appearance and has, in recent years, come under scrutiny.

According to the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) the precautionary removal of the tail of a young puppy needs to be based on compelling evidence that the animal is at high risk of tail trauma due to congenital defect, breed and/or planned working activity. Carrying out a docking surgery for the sake of appearance implies the procedure is not medically indicated and this is insufficient justification for performing such a practice.

For further advice and information on tail docking, speak to your local veterinarian.



# HEALTHY AGING CATS

Cats reach the 'geriatric' life stage at the age of 15, but it is not unusual for them to live to late teens and even into their 20s.

Just as improved diet and medical care have resulted in increased life expectancy in humans, advances in nutrition and veterinary care have increased the lifespan of domestic cats. The result is a growing population of aging cats.

Aging is a natural process. Although many complex physical changes accompany advancing years, age in and of itself is not a disease. Even though many conditions that affect older cats are not correctable, they can often be controlled. The key to making sure your senior cat has the healthiest and highest quality of life possible is to recognise and reduce factors that may be health risks, detect disease as early as possible, and improve or maintain the health of the body's systems.

## Daily grooming

Brushing removes loose hair, preventing it from being swallowed and forming hairballs. Brushing also stimulates blood circulation and sebaceous gland secretions, resulting in a healthier skin and coat. Older cats may not use scratching posts as frequently so nails should be checked and trimmed if necessary.

## Proper nutrition

Many cats tend towards obesity as they age. If your cat is overweight, you should ask your veterinarian to help you modify their diet. Other cats actually become too thin as part of the normal aging process, but progressive weight loss can also be caused by serious medical problems. Ideally you should weigh your cat regularly and report any changes to your vet.

## Exercise

Important, not only for weight control but overall health. Older cats become less agile as arthritis develops and muscles begin to atrophy. Regularly engaging your cat in

moderate play can promote muscle tone and flexibility, increase blood circulation, and help reduce weight in cats that are too heavy. During times of exercise, be alert to laboured breathing or rapid tiring that may suggest a health concern.

## Reducing stress

Older cats are usually less adaptable to change. Introducing a new pet may be a traumatic experience and should be avoided whenever possible. Moving to a new home can be equally stressful. Special provisions should be made for older cats that must be boarded for a period of time. A better alternative is to have the cat cared for at home by a friend or relative.

Owners of older cats often notice changes in their cat's behaviour, but consider these changes an inevitable result of aging and fail to report them to their veterinarian. Cats are experts at hiding illness, and elderly cats are no exception. It is common for a cat to have a serious medical problem, yet not show any sign of it until the condition is quite advanced. Since most diseases can be managed more successfully when detected and treated early in their course, it is important for owners of senior cats to carefully monitor their behaviour and health.

Never assume that changes you see in your older cat are simply due to old age and therefore untreatable. Any alteration in your cat's behaviour or physical condition should alert you to contact your veterinarian.

*Clever*  
**CROSSWORD**

**EACH OF THE WORDS CAN BE FOUND IN THIS ISSUE OF YOUR VET. ANSWERS ARE ON THE BACK PAGE.**

**Across**

1. What might your goldfish need?
5. Breeding dogs is about \_\_\_\_\_, not money.
6. Daily \_\_\_\_\_ can help your aging cat stay healthy.
8. A dog's tail helps them to what?
10. Cats reach which life stage at the age of 15 years?
11. \_\_\_\_\_ is paralysis tick season.
12. How often should you check your pets for the paralysis tick?

**Down**

2. Being a dog breeder requires a lot of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What practice is now under scrutiny? (7, 5)
4. Labrador Retrievers love this!
7. Highly mobile \_\_\_\_\_ make up a dog's tail.
9. How many obese labradors were involved in the recent study?



## FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD

Labrador Retrievers are well known for their love affair with food, but scientists believe their overeating behaviour might actually be the result of a genetic fault instead of just the generosity of their owners.

According to a recent study, some Labrador Retrievers possess a faulty gene that stops it from telling the brain to 'switch off' hunger signals after a meal. Lead researcher Dr Eleanor Raffan, a veterinary surgeon and geneticist from the University of Cambridge, said their findings could finally help to explain why the most popular breed of dog is also unfortunately the most prone to obesity.

The scientists started with an initial cohort of 15 obese and 18 lean labradors and analysed the genetic differences in three obesity-related genes, which are also known to have a weight-regulating effect in humans. They found that a DNA deletion, or mutation, at the POMC gene was more common in the obese labradors than the lean dogs. When the researchers increased the sample size

to include 310 Labrador Retrievers, they discovered the faulty POMC gene was present in around 23 per cent of the dogs.

Further analysis of 38 other dog breeds showed the POMC mutation was present only in one other dog, the Flat Coat Retriever, and that 76 per cent of assistance Labrador Retrievers had the mutation. Dr Raffan believes that this could explain why labradors make such good assistance dogs for people with disabilities, as their food-motivated behaviour makes them easier to train with food rewards.

Further investigation with Labrador Retriever puppies is needed to determine the extent of POMC control on eating and training behaviour. However, it would seem from this research that owners of a Labrador Retriever who have managed to keep their pooch in good shape should be very proud of themselves.

**Reference:** Raffan et al. A deletion in the canine POMC gene is associated with weight and appetite in obesity prone Labrador retriever dogs. *Cell Metabolism*, 2016 DOI: 10.1016/j.cmet.2016.04.012

## THE DANGER OF THE PARALYSIS TICK



Ticks are common in Australia and can be found during all seasons, particularly in tropical regions where humidity is high.

Ticks are parasites which feed on animals and paralysis ticks, in particular, pose a significant threat to pets. Spring marks the start of the paralysis tick season, so now is the time to be extra vigilant in checking your pets.

Paralysis ticks are extremely dangerous as a bite from them can cause severe symptoms or even kill. The illness is caused by a neurotoxin produced in the tick's salivary gland which is injected into the bloodstream of their host when they feed. While numerous ticks are usually present on a dog that is showing signs of tick paralysis, symptoms can also occur after being bitten by just one tick.

Check your pet at least once a day for ticks by running your fingers through their coat. Although most ticks are found around the head and neck of the animal as well as inside the ears, they can end up anywhere. Should you find a tick, remove it and store it so it can be later identified. Always assume there is more than one tick and continue your search. If you suspect your pet may have been bitten by a paralysis tick it is vital that you see your vet immediately.



### PLAY TIME PHOTO COMPETITION

BE IN TO **WIN** A PURE SILVER PENDANT AND CHAIN FROM SILVER PET PRINTS VALUED AT OVER \$200

Send us a photo of your pet enjoying their play time and you could be a winner.

Simply email us a picture of your pet enjoying their play time to:  
[cliniccompetition@gmail.com](mailto:cliniccompetition@gmail.com)

Make sure to tell us your pet's name, your name, address, phone number and the clinic you attend. Please make the subject 'Spring Pet Competition'.

The winning photo shall receive a Silver Pet Prints pendant and chain.

Entries must be received by 30/10/2016\*.

\*deadline for entries has been extended from 31/08/2016

**THAT'S IT! GOOD LUCK!**



[www.silverpetprints.com](http://www.silverpetprints.com)

## THINKING OF BREEDING?

Almost everyone who owns a female dog considers the idea of breeding at least once.

Raising a litter sounds easy and fun - but having puppies isn't all as it appears. Breeding dogs involves much more work and responsibility than most people are prepared for. There is no money to be found in breeding; it is a passion driven hobby and often costs money rather than making it! The general goal when you breed is that you do so to better the breed.

If you do make the decision of reproducing your dog, firstly you must ensure your



dog passes conformation, temperament, health and genetic tests. Then you need to find a compatible stud, with all the same background testing as your female, and is a good non-related pedigree. Breeding is not something that should be taken lightly and you can never do enough research. Most breeders do not simply follow textbook instructions when breeding because to do it correctly requires significant experience and knowledge.

If you plan on breeding your dog or wish to become a professional breeder, consult your veterinarian in the first instance to discuss the process and how to achieve a positive and responsible outcome.

## IS YOUR GOLDFISH HAPPY?

Though you may not spend much time playing with your fish, it is important to understand their behaviour, just like any pet.

Of course, goldfish do not purr, wag their tails or have other obvious ways of indicating their mood to us, so it's not always easy to tell.

However, if you do everything in your power to learn about the proper care of your goldfish, provide for all of their needs and do what you can to avoid stress, your goldfish should be healthy and happy.

The way your fish is acting can tell you if they are healthy or sick, if the aquarium water is properly maintained, and if they are generally content, so be sure to keep an eye on the following:

### Behaviour

Monitor your goldfish's behaviour to ensure it is acting in a normal, healthy way. Goldfish should swim constantly rather than float, bob or sink; they should eat regularly and have an appetite; and they should eliminate waste frequently.



### Appearance

Your goldfish should appear shiny; look for dull areas and scales that don't appear right. Monitor their eyes to make sure they don't get dull or start to look different.

### Interaction

Company will make your goldfish happy! Your goldfish is very social so get them some friends. However, be mindful of overcrowding and keep watch over the relationship between your goldfish and any other tank mates. Some species of fish are much more aggressive than others and your goldfish may become victim to other fish in the tank. Goldfish, unlike other families of fish, should actually be kept in goldfish-only tanks rather than mixed with tropicals or other types of fish.

A final point to note is goldfish do not have eyelids so turning the aquarium lights on and off will not make your goldfish happy! Try using a dimmer instead. Goldfish also hate loud noises so avoid banging or tapping on the tank. A less stressed fish will always be a happier fish!

## PRACTICE UPDATE

### Can I get Q-Fever from contact with animals?

With the lambing/calving/foaling season in full force it is a good time to remember that there is a possibility of contracting a zoonotic disease (a disease which is transferred from animal to human) in the process and precautions should be taken to minimise infection with disease.

Q-Fever is one of the most commonly encountered zoonotic diseases.

The main carriers of the disease are farm animals but other animals such as kangaroos, bandicoots and birds as well as domestic pets such as dogs and cats can be infected. Most infected animals show no symptoms of disease.

It is a disease commonly spread in the birthing fluids of livestock and domestic animals. It may also be spread in urine, faeces and raw milk. The organism responsible is *Coxiella burnetii* which can survive for long periods in the environment. Acute Q-Fever can cause severe flu like symptoms with other symptoms such as pneumonia and hepatitis (inflammation of the liver). Unfortunately up to 10% of Q-Fever patients can develop chronic fatigue like symptoms, lasting more than 6 months. Pregnant women infected with Q-Fever can also have increased risk of miscarriage.

Disease commonly occurs after breathing in affected aerosol droplets from contaminated placental tissues, birthing fluids, milk or urine. Abattoir workers, veterinarians and livestock handlers are commonly affected.

For all diseases, prevention is the best method of protection. The following precautions should be followed-

1. Consider vaccination if you are at high risk of exposure ( see your GP or health care provider).
2. Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling animals or in animal housing areas such as shearing sheds, yards.
3. Wear personal protective equipment (PPE)
  - Wear gloves when touching blood, birth by-products, body fluids.
  - Wear face masks and coveralls.
4. Avoid direct mouth to snout resuscitation of new born animals.
5. Wash hands and arms with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds after contact with animals.
6. Disinfect contaminated equipment and surfaces with 0.05% bleach solution.

Q-Fever can also cause abortion in cows, sheep and goats. Take care when handling afterbirth or material from aborted foetuses, if there are abnormalities detected it can be sent to the laboratory for testing.

**WE NOW STOCK LOCALLY MADE DOG COATS**  
Come in and check out the new range!

**CROSSWORD**  
**ANSWERS**

**Down:** 2. Responsibility 3. Docking Tails 4. Food 7. Vertebrae 9. Fiffteen  
**Across:** 1. Friends 5. Passion 6. Grooming 8. Communicate 10. Geriatric 11. Spring 12. Daily