



Rabbiting on!

Keeping your rabbit fit and well is our main aim and here we look at a few top tips:

Teeth: Rabbits have continually growing teeth which requires a fibrous diet to grind them down. We suggest a diet composed of: 85% hay or grass, 10% leafy vegetables and about an egg cup full of commercial all-in-one rabbit nuggets. Signs of dental disease include excess salivation.

Vaccinations: We recommend that rabbits are vaccinated against two deadly infectious diseases – Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD).

Myxomatosis is spread by blood sucking insects such as rabbit fleas. VHD is spread directly between rabbits or indirectly, via contaminated hutches, bedding or food. There is now a new deadly strain of VHD, called VHD-2.

We recommend annual vaccinations with a combined vaccine against Myxomatosis and VHD(1). A separate vaccine is required to protect against VHD-2.

Fly Strike: As the weather warms up, we strongly recommend all rabbits are checked twice a day for any signs of maggots. Flies are very attracted to rabbits if they have soiled bottoms – here they lay their eggs which rapidly hatch out into flesh eating maggots. Fly strike can appear very suddenly and is a true rabbit emergency.

Keep it social! Rabbits, whether kept indoors or outdoors need space to exercise (with toys, tunnels and areas to dig), areas to hide, areas to sleep and eat. Rabbit hutches should allow them room for three hops minimum. A bonded companion (ideally neutered) can keep what are very social animals, company.

Rabbit photo: Warren Photographic



Spring tick alert!

The warmer spring weather brings with it a host of parasites. Whilst fleas can be very irritating (and a serious cause of skin disease), ticks pose a greater danger to both humans and animals – since they can carry a number of serious infectious diseases.

So what are ticks? Ticks are tiny spider like creatures that live in woods and long grass. Ticks are most active through March to October but they can be about on milder winter days too.

Ticks have four stages to their life-cycle: egg, larva, nymph and adult. Each life-cycle will take a blood meal. When they are looking for their next meal the tick will climb up on vegetation and wait for a passing animal or human to catch with their hooked front legs. The tick then will burrow down to find a suitable place to bite.

The main issue with ticks is that they can carry diseases in their saliva which they can potentially transmit to pets. These include:

- **Lyme disease** is the most common tick borne disease. It can affect dogs and humans, and is carried by a small percentage of *Ixodes* ticks. Affected pets often have lameness that involves multiple joints, fever, lack of appetite and lethargy.
- **Babesiosis** is a tick-borne disease that can affect dogs (but not humans) travelling to and from mainland Europe. It is caused by a tiny blood borne parasite (*Babesia canis*) which destroys red blood cells, leading to anaemia and also dark red urine.
- **Erlchiosis** is another common tick-borne disease in mainland Europe and can cause fatal anaemia. If you take your pet to continental Europe it is essential to protect them against ticks.

How do I protect my pet? We recommend checking your pet every day (especially after walks) to remove ticks before they can attach and feed. If they have attached, then we suggest immediate removal with a special tick removal tool as current evidence suggests that tick-borne diseases take many hours after tick attachment to be transmitted. We are always happy to assist you with tick removal and to discuss future tick prevention. Additionally – using a product that rapidly kills or repels ticks will help to reduce the risk of these diseases. Please contact us to discuss the various options available to protect your pet from tick-borne diseases.

Check your pets for ticks!



Parting the coat reveals an *Ixodes* tick. These are widespread across the UK and Ireland and may be infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the organism that causes Lyme disease in dogs and humans.

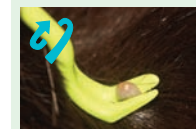


Dermacentor ticks can potentially carry *Babesia* organisms, the cause of

Babesiosis in dogs. These ticks are found in mainland Europe and parts of the UK and Ireland.

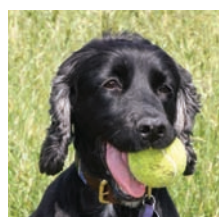
Tick removal tips

Specially designed v-shaped tick removers that remove ticks by rotation are very effective at removing ticks using a simple



twisting and pulling action.

Could it be Kennel Cough?



Kennel cough is a very infectious, but rarely life-threatening, respiratory infection that spreads from dog to dog wherever they meet – out on walks, training classes and of course kennels. The condition can involve several viral components, plus a bacterium – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*.

It causes a harsh cough, an inflamed throat and sometimes nasal discharge. The signs can be dramatic, and it is not uncommon for owners to become concerned their pets have something stuck in their throats. The cough is often self-limiting, but can still persist for 2-3 weeks.

To give your dog the best protection against Kennel Cough, an intranasal vaccine is available to reduce the risk of developing the disease and reduce clinical signs. This is given *in addition* to your pet's standard vaccines. Please call us at the surgery for further information.

Be worm aware!



Many people believe that if their pet had worms they would know. We might expect them to be a bit poorly and lose weight, or maybe have diarrhoea, dry coats, pot bellies or itchy bottoms. But most adult animals can be carrying worms with very few or no symptoms at all!

So what are the major types of worms that we need to be aware of?

Roundworms are most commonly found in young animals but can infect adults as well. Many pups and kittens are born infected with roundworms because they cross the placenta and are also in the milk. Roundworms look like long strings of spaghetti but are usually only seen if there is a heavy burden or you give your pet a dewormer. Adult roundworms shed eggs which are passed out in your pets faeces and infect the environment. The eggs become infective within a few weeks and pets can become re-infected by unwittingly eating the eggs, often whilst grooming. Additionally the eggs can pose a risk to humans if accidentally ingested.



Tapeworms live in the intestines and shed small *mobile* segments that pass out in the faeces and are often found around the tail areas of cats. As the segments break down, they release eggs into the environment. These eggs may be eaten by *intermediate hosts* – these include **fleas** and **small rodents** such as mice and voles. As a result, tapeworms can be acquired via food (cats eating small rodents) or via swallowing an infected flea during grooming. Pets with tapeworms may not show any obvious clinical signs, meaning that they can be carried silently. Some animals will show failure to thrive, malaise and diarrhoea.

Lungworm: As well as being a menace to your garden, slugs and snails can carry lungworm (*Angiostrongylus vasorum*). Dogs are infected by eating slugs or snails carrying lungworm larvae, or even just eating grass that has slug or snail slime on it. Lungworm are swallowed as tiny larvae which migrate to the right side of the heart, where they develop into adult worms. Here they produce eggs which hatch out into larvae, which migrate to the lungs causing coughing. The larvae are then coughed up, swallowed and passed out in the faeces. Signs can range from none, to a soft cough, to life threatening bleeding disorders.



Regular prescription worming and flea treatments for your pet, picking up dog faeces, good hand hygiene, plus attempting to prevent your dogs eating slugs and snails, will all help to keep you and your pet safe. How often you should protect your pet depends on their lifestyle and habits – so come and have a chat and we can hopefully make sure they have a worm-free life!

Rogues gallery of worms!



Typical Roundworms
– in this case *Toxocara canis*



Tapeworm segments
– e.g. *Taenia taeniaeformis*



Electron micrograph of an adult lungworm
Lungworm photo: courtesy Bayer.

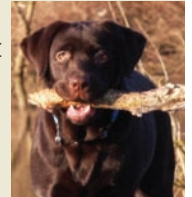


Spring into action!

With Spring around the corner we all look forward to some warmer weather and spring walks. With this in mind, here are a few seasonal tips:

Stick to balls!

We strongly suggest you avoid throwing sticks for your dog to chase. Sticks are innocuous looking things, but with the right speed and trajectory, they can become a weapon. Not only a weapon, but a breakable weapon that can leave foreign material behind in a wound some distance from the original problem. These are what are sometimes termed 'tip of the iceberg' type injuries and can cause massive damage and distress to all.



This is a typical stick injury where the stick has become lodged in the dog's throat.

Easter alert! With Easter soon upon us, chocolate and other tasty treats like simnel cakes and hot cross buns will start to appear in houses, so please be aware of the risks these pose. **Chocolate** contains the chemical theobromine and cakes can have **raisins** and **currants** in them. As with all poisonings, contact us at once if you are concerned.

Lily Alert! With Mothering Sunday on the horizon, be aware of lilies in flower bouquets. All components of the plants are toxic to cats and there can be a delay between cats ingesting/licking lilies and the kidney problems that follow.



Stay flea free! With the hopefully warmer weather comes potential for greatly increased flea activity! We recommend using an appropriate veterinary flea product for optimal control – please let us advise you on the ideal product for your needs. Fleas are very fast so just because you can't see them, doesn't mean they aren't there! Enjoy your springtime.



Can you pinch an inch?



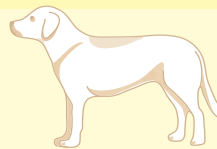
It's that time of year again where we jump on the scales with a sense of trepidation – and it's often no different for our pets! However, even without scales you can easily check your pet's body condition score at home. An ideal condition score for dogs and cats is described as "Outline of ribs can be easily felt through a slight fat cover. Waist can be observed behind the ribs when viewed from above. Abdominal tuck is present."

It can be very challenging for pets to lose weight, so *stopping* the scales going up in the first place is the key objective! We advise measuring their meals out every day, feeding a diet designed for their lifestyle (for example, neutered pets and older pets need fewer calories), keeping treats to a minimum and absolutely no table scraps!

However, if your best friend is already looking a little broad in the beam, we can help you. Why not book in for a weight clinic and we can give advice tailored to your pet and their lifestyle. Our top tips include: choosing a lower calorie diet, feeding from puzzle bowls rather than boring, ordinary ones and cutting back on treats.

Carrying extra weight will leave pets prone to arthritis and diabetes, amongst other things, and may shorten their lifespan. So – if you are worried about your pet's weight, please come and discuss the options we have to help your pet slim down and reap the benefits of weight loss.

IDEAL WEIGHT



Outline of ribs can be easily felt through a slight fat cover

OVER WEIGHT



Ribs difficult to feel through a moderate to thick fat cover