



## In this month's issue



### 1 SUMMER BUNNIES – Keeping rabbits happy and healthy in hot weather.

With the warmer weather approaching rabbits are at risk from a number of problems. Read how rabbits can be helped to stay healthy through the summer months.

### 2 GRASS SEED INJURIES IN DOGS

Dogs with injuries caused by grass seeds is an extremely common seasonal problem. Breeds with hairy ears and hairy feet are more at risk.

### 3 PETS AND CHRISTMAS

We want the holidays to be a happy time for you and your pet, not a time for an emergency visit to your veterinarian. The food that makes the holidays so much fun for us can be dangerous for your pet.

### 4 DOG TRAINING AND BEHAVIOUR

First impressions can have long lasting effects, so taking the time to plan the first meeting is a high priority. If an initial meeting goes badly it can take a lot of effort to reverse the detrimental psychological effects, let alone repair any physical injuries.

## Summer Bunnies: Keeping rabbit happy and healthy in hot weather.

With summer on the horizon and plans for the warmer weather underway, it's worth owners taking a few simple steps to make sure their rabbits enjoy the season as much as they do.

### Fly Strike

Warmer weather can mean more flies which seek our dirty areas to lay their eggs. The hatching maggots love warm dirty areas and if they hatch on the rabbit or small pet's body they can literally eat them alive, causing terrible damage to their skin. This is "fly strike" and sadly, the majority of small pets presented to veterinary surgeons with this condition do not survive.

Luckily there are preventative measures that can be taken to protect rabbits from this nasty condition. Rabbits should be checked at least two to three times a day to ensure they and their living areas are clean. It is especially important to check their rear end and for matted fur, abscesses and open wounds which may also attract flies.

Elderly rabbits or those with arthritis can also be vulnerable to fly strike and may need more attention.

Rabbits can be protected from flies by putting "fly screens"

around their living areas and runs. There are also liquid products that can be applied to the rear of the rabbit to prevent fly eggs from hatching although it is still important to check the rabbit twice a day.

If owners see a maggot on or near their rabbit, it is an emergency. They should contact their veterinary practice immediately and get them checked over. Sadly, cases of fly strike may mean intensive treatment which can take weeks or even euthanasia so rabbit should be prevented from becoming a victim.

### Keeping Cool

All pets need access to plenty of fresh, clean water at all times, and particularly once the weather starts to heat up. If the rabbit lives outside, their water should be checked often – it will evaporate faster in hot weather.

Rabbits can also get extra moisture from special treats like pieces of apple or celery, but the main part of the rabbit's diet should be an unlimited amount of fresh hay. Fresh fruit and vegetables should be part of a balanced diet, but fruit should be fed in moderation because it is high in sugar – so no more than two tablespoons worth per day.

It is important to keep rabbits in good shape, as if they are overweight they will struggle to clean themselves in tricky to





reach areas, which can also make them more vulnerable to fly strike.

Misting the rabbit with cool water can help them remain at a comfortable temperature and it's important to brush out excess fur too. Longhaired rabbits can have their coat cropped by a professional groomer. We also recommend filling a 2 litre plastic bottle with water and freezing it to make an "ice block" and placing this in the rabbit's hutch to provide for additional cooling.

Pale and bare coated pets are vulnerable to getting sunburn, just like humans. It is best to keep white and light-furred rabbits indoors during the hottest parts of the day and if they are outside, they should be kept out of the sun by moving their run into a cooler, shaded area. Ideally, a run will be attached to the hutch, so rabbits can go in out of the sun if they get too hot (or if it rains!).

A child-friendly sunblock can be applied to exposed areas like their nose and tips of their ears. Sadly, sunburn in pets can lead to skin cancer and possible amputation of their ears and nose, so any pigmentation on a pet's pale areas should be checked by the veterinary surgeon as soon as possible.

## Grass Seed Injuries in Dogs

Dogs with injuries caused by grass seeds is an extremely common seasonal problem. Breeds with hairy ears and hairy feet and/or dense coats are more at risk if walked in grassed areas not regularly mowed, where these



grasses commonly grow in abundance. The common occurrence of problems caused by grass seeds is mainly down to their minute shape coupled with its unique design. This enables them to attach themselves easily to an animal's fur and burrow into the skin of that victim's body part.



### Where do grass seeds commonly affect dogs?

The two most common presentations of a dog with a grass seed are the foot and the ear, although other places on your dog's body can be at risk too. Grass seeds commonly get in between the toes of the dog's foot, referred to as the interdigital space. The grass seed already attached to the surrounding soft feathery fur now makes its way towards the foot itself, penetrating with ease the thin skin before starting to burrow deep into - and through - highly sensitive tissues of the foot resulting in extreme pain, discomfort, infection and sudden onset (acute) lameness. The second most common place for these seeds to cause problems is down the ear canal, their uni-directional nature and shape allows the grass seed to work its way from the fur around the ears down along the ear canal, and come to rest right up against the delicate ear drum.

### How can I tell that my dog has been affected by grass seeds?

Your dog may shake its head, vigorously lick its paws or you may notice swelling or discharge from a wounds on flanks, armpits, etc. They may also look uncomfortable, lethargic and in a lot of pain. If you notice any of the above signs, especially head-shaking, paw-licking or any other abnormality - then call your vet straightaway for the most successful treatment outcomes. Finally, please help to raise awareness and tell others, especially first-time dog owners, of the symptoms to look out for, as a tiny little grass seed can often be the cause of one of the most painful, expensive, and common conditions our beloved dogs can suffer from.

### What treatment is available for dogs that have been affected by grass seeds?

Your vet may try fishing around through the entry-hole with a specially designed long pair of tweezers called





'crocodile forceps'. As grass seeds are made from vegetable matter they're invisible on x-ray (unlike bone or metal) so their exact location within the paw is usually a mystery. Sometimes a second hole is detected where the grass seed has already travelled through and exited through the other side leaving a narrow empty tunnel, or 'sinus', connecting the two. If it is the ear that is affected, your vet may examine the ear to confirm the diagnosis and remove the grass seed with tweezers. Your vet may prefer to sedate your dog as they may be in too much pain to allow your vet to examine and for safe removal.

**Source:** <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/health/pet-health-information/grass-seeds/>

## Food Hazards over Christmas

### Chocolate, Turkey Bones, Ham and other yummys!!

Even if your dog looks at you with pleading eyes, resist the urge to throw holiday table scraps his way. Rich, fatty foods, like gravy or grease, can cause problems ranging from stomach upsets to pancreatitis, which is an inflammation of the pancreas resulting in pain, vomiting, and dehydration. Dogs with this serious condition often require hospitalization for treatment and in rare occasions can be fatal. Ingested bones can splinter and cause an obstruction or lacerations of your dog's digestive system. Other foods that we find delicious can in fact be fatal to some animals.

- Chocolate, which stimulates the nervous system and the heart, should be kept far away from four-legged friends. Although all chocolate should be avoided, dark chocolate poses a greater risk than sweeter varieties, such as milk chocolate. Problems from ingestion range from diarrhoea to seizures and death.
- Bones from fish, meat, or poultry can also cause problems if swallowed. Even small bones can splinter causing lacerations (tearing) throughout the intestinal tract. So, no matter how big or how little they are be sure to avoid all bones.
- Certain nuts should not be given to pets. Almonds, walnuts and pistachios can cause an upset stomach or an obstruction of your dog's throat and/or intestinal tract. Macadamia nuts and walnuts can be toxic, causing seizures or neurological signs. Lethargy, vomiting and loss of muscle control are among the effects of nut ingestion.
- The artificial sweetener, xylitol, that is present in some gums, breath mints, candy, and other human food can be very toxic to dogs and can cause his blood pressure to drop to dangerously low levels.
- Grapes and raisins contain a toxin which can damage the kidneys.

- Pets should never ingest alcoholic beverages because alcohol depresses the nervous system.
- Alcohol may cause vomiting, disorientation, diarrhoea, lethargy, lack of coordination, difficulty breathing, tremors, coma, and seizures.

### Helpful Hints:

Theobromine is the toxic compound found in chocolate. If your animal ingests any chocolate give us a ring and we can calculate the amount of Theobromine ingested and advise you on the course of action to take.



Remember when trimming the ham/chicken or turkey that fat trimmed from meat, both cooked and uncooked, has a high risk of causing pancreatitis.

Well-intentioned family and friends may share holiday foods with pets. To control excessive food intake by your pets and meet your guests' desires to feed the pets, dole out the treats your pets would normally receive and let your guests "treat" the pets.

If you want to get festive, mix some of your pet's regular food with water to make "dough" and roll out and cut into festive shapes, then bake until crunchy.

Rubbish bins contain all kinds of hazards for your dog especially at Christmas time.

Remember, dogs have an exceptional sense of smell – juices on plastic or aluminum foil left on counter-tops are very tempting. If ingested, plastic or foil wrap (cellophane candy wrappers or food wrap) can cause choking or intestinal obstruction.

Meat-soaked strings from rump roasts are also enticing. Ingestion can cause a surgical emergency called a 'linear string foreign body' in the intestines.





To be safe, put away food immediately and pet-proof your garbage. Feed your pet(s) before a party so they will not be so apt to beg or steal food. Clean up glasses after holiday parties. Dogs are often attracted by the sweet taste of drinks, especially eggnog.

**Sources:**

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

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## Dog Training Tips

by Sonya Bevan "Dog Charming"

### First Impressions Matter: Safely Introducing Dogs

First impressions can have long lasting effects, so taking the time to plan the first meeting is a high priority. If an initial meeting goes badly it can take a lot of effort to reverse the detrimental psychological effects, let alone repair any physical injuries.

Here are some suggested guidelines:

1. Have one handler per dog.
2. Meet in a neutral environment first, not one of the dog's homes.
3. Choose larger areas, not confined spaces.
4. Allow ample time, don't rush or force introductions. Let the dogs go at their own pace and allow an avenue of escape or retreat.
5. Let each dog investigate the environment first for an extended period, away from each other, before bringing them into contact.
6. Introduce relaxed dogs, not highly aroused dogs.
7. Use loose leads rather than tight unless required for safety and to remove dogs from each other.
8. Intervene only if required and distract quickly if needed.
9. If in doubt: DON'T introduce. If you have no idea how either dog will react but fear one may bite or attack, don't introduce them or seek professional assistance. If you really don't think they will get on, ask yourself, "Why am I introducing them in the first place?"

Please note that the guidelines suggested are exactly that: guide-lines. With more experience and a history of the two dogs, one has a better chance of predicting if two dogs will be fine to greet on their first meeting. If there is any doubt, however, you will need some sort of backup plan such as leads to allow safe separation of the dogs

should things go pear-shaped. Ideally, seek the help of a behaviour professional if you are unsure or nervous.

Avoid advice which refers to dogs as having dominant personalities to explain behaviour and encourages using aversive stimuli/punishment to introduce dogs (eg. choker collars, shock collars, leash jerks, yelling). Dominance is not a personality trait and has no practical application when dealing with introducing dogs safely. Furthermore, most aggression in dogs is driven by a desire to escape (which is prevented when on lead) or a desire to remove a source of fear by scaring it away. Having on-lead meetings with short, tense leads and anxious handlers tugging and yelling can actually create conflict that might not have otherwise occurred. I only recommend muzzles if the dog wearing the muzzle is already accustomed to and happy to wear one. If not, placing a muzzle for the first time on a dog and then introducing a strange dog may create a negative association with the new dog. That's not setting the scene for a good introduction! It is important to be confident and calm before even considering an introduction. It is so important, I'll repeat: If in doubt – DON'T. Seek assistance.

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