Cats are highly independent, aloof and often solitary creatures. They make wonderful companions and become part of the family. However, few owners of outdoor cats truly know where and what their cat gets up to when they are outside. It is now known that cats have just as happy and fulfilled lives as indoor only pets. There is now a wide range of feline furniture, fencing and frivolities to enrich even the most adventurous cat.

As veterinarians we recognise a number of serious conditions associated with an outdoor lifestyle. Trauma is by far the most common detriment to the health and wellbeing of an outdoor cat. Traumatic incidences include motor vehicle accidents, dog attacks and cat fights which result in emotionally and financially costly experience. Medical conditions such as Feline Aids (FIV), Feline Leukemia, parasitism, skin cancers (especially in white cats), snake bite and poisonings are also much higher in incident in outdoor cats. Signs of ill health can often be hidden when a cat spends most its time outdoors. They may have vomiting, diarrhoea or problems urinating without the owners being aware. Weight control can be difficult for outdoor cats, who may be supplementing their diet by hunting or scavenging food from neighbours. Another consideration is not only the physical trauma or medical illness that outdoor cats are at risk of, but the mental stress that can result from being outdoors. For some cats being outdoors is a daunting experience which can lead to chronic anxiety. Also let’s not forget an indoor cat is not causing detriment to our native animal population by hunting nor are they at risk of getting lost or being stolen.

Environmental enrichment is essential in keeping your indoor cat both mentally and physically happy. Be creative and clever in your design. Utilise vertical space with cat trees, scratching posts and shelving along walls for perches around the house. Provide dens, boxes and baskets for sleeping, playing and hiding. Toys that encourage thinking and normal behaviour patterns such as chasing, stalking and chewing. Try hide and seek food games and plant cat friendly plants such as cat nip (nepeta cataria) and cat grass (dactylis glomerata or oats avena sativa). If you absolutely cannot confine your cat inside, then make a safe outdoor enclosure for them or choose roller fencing which will prevent your cat from being able to leave your property and stop other cats getting in. If you’re up for the challenge lead train your cat so you can go for walks together.

Studies have shown that an indoor cat has a significantly longer lifespan than an outdoor counterpart. So protect your cat and choose an indoor lifestyle.
Bloat resulting in twisting of the stomach (gastric dilation volvulus) is considered one of the most critical emergencies seen in dogs. This condition affects mostly large and deep chested breeds such as Dobermans, Ridgebacks, Great Danes, and Weimeraners but can happen in any dog. It is poorly understood as to what causes the stomach to twist but the consequences of this occurring are life-threatening. In the normal stomach fluid, food and gas are moved by rhythmic contractions into the small intestines for further digestion and absorption. The stomach is designed to expand with the ingestion of food and gas, but in some instances can become extraordinarily stretched. If distended enough the stomach starts to turn on itself, resulting in obstruction of the blood vessels to the stomach and occlusion of the entrance and exit to the stomach trapping gas and ingesta. This condition is extremely painful, is rapidly progressive and often leads to shock, circulatory collapse and death if not quickly recognised and treated.

Dogs that develop bloat will show signs of retching and often non-productive vomiting, salivation and lip licking, rapid breathing, pain, sudden lethargy or restlessness. The abdomen may be large and hard. There are a number of factors that may increase the risk of bloat occurring, but often there is not a specific cause identified in cases that occur.

Risk factors include:

- Feeding before or after exercise, eating rapidly and feeding only one meal a day.
- Dry foods are at a higher risk than wet foods.
- Dogs with nervous, aggressive or anxious temperaments, especially in stressful situations.
- Familial history of bloat.
- Dogs that are underweight.
- Male dogs higher risk than female dogs.
- Mature dogs >7 years of age.

There has been no link made between certain types of diet fed and the risk of developing bloat. To reduce the risk of bloat it is recommended that dogs are not fed a meal within 2 hours of exercise. Incorporating wet food and feeding smaller more frequent meals may also reduce the risk.

If you suspect bloat in your dog it is a medical emergency which requires immediate veterinary attention. Diagnosis is usually made on clinical history, clinical examination and x-rays of the abdomen. Immediate treatment for pain and shock is required, followed by x-rays which are fundamental in determining whether or not the stomach has twisted around itself. Where the stomach has twisted, emergency surgery is required to untwist the stomach. Decompression of the stomach via a stomach tube fed down the oesophagus or a trochar (large bore needle) inserted through the abdominal wall into the distended stomach may be necessary. The longer the stomach remains twisted the more likely there is to be permanent damage and death to the stomach tissue, intestines and possibly spleen from the lack of blood supply. In most cases once the stomach is untwisted a gastropexy will be performed. This surgery permanently adheres the stomach wall to the abdominal muscle wall preventing the stomach from being able to twist again. This does not prevent bloating just the ability of the stomach to twist on itself. In some cases a gastropexy is performed as a preventative procedure in at risk individuals. However given there is no way of predicting which individuals may develop gastric dilation volvulus, a gastropexy is only performed electively and not considered a routine procedure.

Meet ‘Hank’, a 6 year old Ridgeback who presented to the clinic with Gastric Dilation Volvulus in March this year, Hank had emergency surgery to un-twist his stomach and is now back to good health.
Many older pets present to the vet clinic after their owners notice lumps. We can characterise lumps in several ways.

Some lumps may be characterised by their affiliation with a specific location or organ within the body, for example a mammary lump, abdominal lump or splenic (spleen) lump. Alternatively lumps can be characterised as either subcutaneous (under the skin) or cutaneous (on top or as part of the skin). Subcutaneous lumps may involve or be attached to deeper tissue layers, whereas cutaneous lumps generally only invade one or multiple layers of the dermis (skin). Lumps may feel soft or hard and may be mobile or fixed. A lump may appear suddenly or grow slowly. Changes in pigmentation, hair loss, erosions or ulcers associated with a lump will also help in characterising it. However because a lump can be any combination of the above features it is impossible to diagnose what a lump is just on its appearance alone. All of this information that helps us characterise a lump is important in determining what types of tests may be needed to diagnose the lump.

It is almost always recommended that fine needle aspirates are taken of the lumps that are newly noticed or that have changed with time. An aspirate is a simple non-invasive way of investigating lumps. A needle is inserted into the core of the lump and a small sample of the cells are aspirated then applied to a slide for examination under the microscope. This gives us useful information about the types of cells that make up a lump. Fine needle aspirates can help differentiate between lumps depending on the appearance of the cells; if cells look uniform and of a specific cell type then we may be able to diagnose the origin of the lump or at least detect whether it is likely to be benign. If white blood cells are seen then it may suggest an infectious or inflammatory cause to the lump or if fluid is removed it may be a cystic, inflammatory or infectious process pending on the fluids appearance. Most importantly if atypical, non-uniform cells are seen we can surmise that the lump may be malignant. If the results of the aspiration raise such suspicion that the lump may be malignant further testing is required usually via biopsy.

A limitation with fine needle aspirates is that they only sample a small population of the cells within the lump. In some instances there may not be enough cells to get a conclusive result or the cells aspirated may not be completely representative of those making up the lump. In these cases biopsy of the lump is necessary. A biopsy is a surgical procedure involving a general anaesthetic, where a section of the lump (wedge biopsy) or all of the lump (excisional biopsy) is removed and then sent for histopathology examination by pathologists. Histopathology is the examination of tissue affected by disease and it allows us to differentiate and diagnose the cause of lumps with the most confidence and accuracy. A wedge biopsy is useful if a diagnosis prior to complete removal of the lump is needed. Excisional biopsy is usually the best option, especially where lumps are small, and involves removing the lump in its entirety. To remove a lump in its entirety removal of healthy tissue surrounding the lump is also required. The size and location of the lump may limit the amount of tissue that can be taken from surrounding areas. In some instances abnormal cells are left behind, resulting in the need for subsequent surgery or chemotherapy to minimise the risk of the lump then returning. Where the lump is too large for complete removal referral to a specialist surgeon may be required or a debulking surgery can be performed where the bulk of the lump is removed to allow for better comfort but not all the abnormal cells are removed. An alternative option with some cancerous lumps is treatment with chemotherapy to reduce the size of the lump prior to surgical removal.

If you notice a lump on your pet, consider the following:

- Is the lump in a location where if it got bigger would it impact on other structures, cause discomfort or immobility?
- If the lump grew would it be easily removed accounting for margins with enough surrounding healthy tissue.
- If the lump gets bigger this lengthens surgery time and may require more advanced surgical techniques, making the risk of complications or re occurrence higher.
- Even previously tested lumps, can change, so lumps always require close monitoring. Look for changes in size, firmness, pain, hair loss, pigmentation and ulceration. Have lumps checked annually and if there is concerns have them aspirated or surgically removed.

12-WEEK TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGE

Winter is a common time of year when we see our pets putting on weight, often masked by a thicker coat and the cold weather, being less inviting for owners to get out and exercise. Pets often gain small amounts of weight each year, over many years these small weight gains can lead to obesity. 95% of obesity cases in cats and dogs are treated successfully with diet and exercise.

Take a stand this winter and kick start your pet’s weight loss program by taking our 12 week transformation challenge. Register your interest at the clinic by booking in a FREE body condition consultation between the 1st July and 31st August where we can assess your pet’s current weight and determine what types of tests may be needed to diagnose the lump. We will discuss diet and give your pet a specific diet plan with Hills Metabolic Diet and an include a Hills Metabolic Prize Pack.

There are a number of health risks associated with obesity in pets including diabetes and liver disease. Obesity also exacerbates heart disease, arthritis and increases the risks associated with anaesthesia and surgery. Studies have shown that obese pets have a shorter life-span and also poorer quality of life. It is important to recognise weight gain in your pet and make changes to their diet and exercise regime early on to prevent disease and maintain good health.
This Winter the Doubleview Vet Centre is hosting a special on senior pet health checks and blood tests. The promotion is for dogs and cats over 7 years of age. This is a good opportunity to screen your pet for common ailments such as liver, kidney and thyroid disease as well as diabetes. These tests are a great way to get a better understanding of your pet’s general health and may alert you to early stages of chronic disease. Early diagnosis of conditions often leads to more successful treatment and management to slow the disease progress and give your pet the best quality of life in their twilight years. We are offering three packages for senior pets, SAVING OF UP TO 25%!

- **GOLD** – Consultation, full general health profile blood test including thyroid test, urine concentration and dipstick, blood pressure and intra-ocular pressure check. $455 (RRP $600)
- **SILVER** – Consultation, full general health profile blood test including thyroid test, urine concentration and dipstick. $375 (RRP $495)
- **BRONZE** – Consultation and minor health profile urine concentration and dipstick. $185 (RRP $245)

All senior pets will receive a thorough physical exam, the opportunity to discuss the blood tests and other common senior pet problems such as arthritis, lumps, heart disease, vision/hearing loss and senility with our vets and learn what options there are for your pet. Furthermore any senior pet that has one of the above senior packages as part of senior season, will receive a 20% off a dental scale and polish for their pet (cost of dental extractions and medications not included). All senior promotions end on the 31st of August, so get in quick to take advantage of these great savings.

**ACUPUNCTURE & MASSAGE**

If you have a beloved ageing dog, you may consider looking at alternative therapies that can further invigorate a state of wellbeing in their senior years. Acupuncture and Massage are now frequently used as adjunctive therapies to manage chronic pain and also enhance quality of life. Both acupuncture and massage are proven to increase blood circulation, lymphatic drainage and improve muscle health. The Doubleview Vet Centre will be hosting both acupuncture and massage appointments with qualified professionals Dr. Karin Nygren and Melody Wain to our patients during Seniors Month and encourage pet owners.

Dr Karin Nygren graduated as a vet from Murdoch University in 1993. While working in the United Kingdom she completed a short veterinary acupuncture course in 2003 and has continued to use acupuncture as an adjunctive treatment since then. Dr Nygren believes in conventional medicine as a first line approach, but finds that many cases can also benefit from ancillary treatments such as acupuncture. She primarily uses acupuncture to treat painful conditions like arthritis and back pain and has seen excellent results. Dr Nygren has been with the Doubleview Vet Centre for the last three years part time and is now with us as a locum and acupuncturist.

Acupuncture is the ancient art of placing needles in certain points on the body, called acupoints, and has been developed and used in humans for over 4000 years and animals for over 2000 years. It can be used to treat a variety of medical conditions and will often get results where conventional medicines either have not worked or where the patient has reacted adversely to medications.

This year Dr Nygren is undertaking the Small Animal Acupuncture Training Program run by the Chi Institute in Adelaide, to further develop her skills and knowledge within this field. “I am excited to be pursuing this further study so that I will be able to treat a wider range of conditions including dermatitis, gastrointestinal disease and anxiety to name a few. It will also give me the ability to provide a full diagnostic workup using the Traditional Chinese Medicine approach which allows a more holistic way of treating my patients”, says Dr Karin.

Dr Nygren is available for acupuncture treatments on Thursday afternoons from 2.30-4.30pm and at other times by prior arrangement. If you would like more information about acupuncture please contact the clinic.

Melody Wain is a professional myo-therapist from In Touch With Dog and she will be offering remedial massage appointments at the clinic during Seniors Season. Melody explains “Canine massage offers a whole health package of physical and mental benefits. Like people, a dog’s behaviour and emotional state are directly influenced by how they feel physically. Remedial Massage can help maintain muscle tone, range of motion and flexibility while decreasing the atrophy of muscle tissue and relieving the pain and discomfort of aching muscles. Massage also induces “feel good” endorphins that help to ease a dog’s emotional state in response to pain & frustration. There are numerous other physical benefits, and while gentle bonding massages conducted by the owner is encouraged, professional massage techniques are recommended for dogs with musculoskeletal injuries and age related conditions.”

**For any more information on any of the articles seen in this seasons’ issue of ‘Paws For Thought’ contact the clinic on 9341 1200**

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Let us know your email address so we can send reminders and newsletters direct to you via email in the future!