



Disease alert!

Babesiosis is a global disease and is widespread throughout southern and central continental Europe. It is caused by a tiny parasite – *Babesia canis* – that infects red blood cells, causing anaemia, dark red urine, pale gums, lethargy and fever.

Babesia canis is spread by the Ornate Dog Tick *Dermacentor reticulatus* and poses a significant risk to pets travelling abroad with the Pet Travel Scheme. This is why it is so important to treat your dogs for ticks whilst abroad and before returning home.

Until recently there have only been rare cases of babesiosis in untravelling dogs in the UK. However this changed in Spring 2016 with a cluster of cases in Harlow, Essex. More recently two fresh cases have emerged 20 miles away from the initial outbreak, raising the possibility that this tick-borne disease could become more widespread across the UK and Ireland.

Lyme disease is widespread across the UK and Ireland and spread by the sheep tick – *Ixodes ricinus* (pictured left).

It is caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi* and can cause recurrent lameness due to inflammation of the joints. Humans can also suffer from Lyme disease.

Take two simple steps to minimise the risk of tick-borne diseases:

- Monitor pets daily for ticks and remove promptly with a tick hook.
- Use chemical tick protection – please let us recommend the best product for your pets.

If you would like further information on ticks and tick-borne diseases, please ask a member of our team!



Dental Care for Cats



Dental disease is considered the most prevalent disease in cats three years of age and older with up to 70% of cats affected.

What is Dental Disease?

Dental disease begins when bacteria colonize the mouth leading to inflammation, periodontal disease and formation of a plaque biofilm. Over time this biofilm mineralizes and calcifies into tartar. Additional factors such as misaligned teeth, systemic disease, nutrition, and genetics may also contribute to disease.

The gold standard for preventative dental home care is tooth brushing, although we accept this can be very tricky in our feline patients! Additionally, a variety of dental prescription and non-prescription diets, treats and toys, along with oral rinses, gels, sprays and water additives have been developed.

Once dental disease has progressed past the early stages home care is not sufficient and professional dental therapy is required.

In addition to periodontal disease and tartar, cats can also develop other dental diseases, including feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions (little holes in the enamel usually starting at the gum line), stomatitis (widespread inflammation of the mouth), and fractured teeth.

What to Look for?

Signs of dental pathology can include bad breath, dropping food or chewing only on one side of the mouth, facial swellings or draining wounds, bleeding or discharge from the mouth or nose, sneezing, pawing at the mouth, tooth grinding, or discoloured teeth. However, in cats, often there are no obvious signs of dental disease, they are usually still eating without a noticeable change in appetite!

What happens if my cat needs dental treatment at the practice?

It is difficult to fully assess the 30 teeth of an awake adult cat so it won't be a surprise to hear that in cats with dental disease an anaesthetic is required to perform a complete dental examination.

We are fortunate at each of our Wingrave surgeries to have a dedicated dental suite with dental xray machine so we can undertake a thorough dental examination with radiography where appropriate to assess tooth root health. Diseased teeth are surgically extracted and all remaining teeth are scaled and polished just like when we visit the dentist!

We want to invite all of our feline friends to come in for a free dental check with a vet. Please contact your local Wingrave surgery today.



Gum disease (reddened gum margins) is a sign of an unhealthy mouth and can lead to tooth loss.



Tooth Resorptive Lesion (arrowed). The tooth is progressively destroyed.

Some pets will eat anything!



Staying on the subject of things that pets like to eat, some pets unfortunately love snacking on a wide variety of everyday items that end up stuck in their stomach or small intestines.

Cats, and particularly kittens, are very keen on swallowing tinsel at Christmas, wool and other stringy objects (often with needles attached as well!). These almost invariably get stuck in their small intestines and require surgery to remove them.

Dogs seem to delight in eating socks, children's toys - the list is huge! Unfortunately many of these objects, once swallowed, will require surgery to remove them.

So – as well as trying to ensure your pets don't eat these objects, we strongly recommend **pet insurance** to cover you against these unexpected eventualities!



A very expensive sock that was removed from the intestines of a dog



Cat photo: Warren Photographic.

Caring for your older cat – some top tips!



In their twilight years our cats can suffer from a range of conditions, but they are also experts at hiding the signs of illness! So, looking out for subtle changes in their behaviour can really make a difference. Here are some tips:

Sore joints: Recent studies have shown that approximately 80% of cats over the age of twelve have arthritis. However, it can be difficult to identify because they simply rest more, and because they are naturally athletic animals, they will often still jump, climb and play, but not as much as they

used to. Ask us to check their joints next time you are paying us a visit, and if we are concerned, a trial of pain relief medication often lets us know if they are sore or not. Make a stiff, elderly cat's life easier by placing steps up to their favourite places, putting food bowls close to where they rest, using low sided litter trays and giving them deep, soft beds in warm, cosy places.

Weight loss: Senior cats can lose weight due to many different conditions, but often it is such a gradual process we don't notice. It's a good idea to get into the habit of weighing your pensionable pussycat on a regular basis and if you notice a downward trend, bring them in for a check-up.

Drinking more: Kidney Failure and Diabetes are fairly common in older cats and both will cause them to drink more than they should. In fact, cats naturally drink very little, so often a cat who drinks 'well', is actually drinking to excess and should have a check-up.



Eating less: Sore teeth and Kidney Failure are two of the most likely causes of a reduced or changed appetite in a cat. If their mouth is painful they often keep eating, but they may start to prefer wet food or, if watched carefully, not actually chew properly. It can be difficult to fully check their mouths at home, so if you are worried, just bring them down!

Eating more: An over-active thyroid gland (Hyperthyroidism) and Diabetes will both make cats eat more, and while this is often taken as a sign of good health, it can be the opposite, especially if they are losing weight *despite* their appetite.

So – as you can see there are a lot of signs to keep a watchful eye out for. In addition it's also a good idea to bring older pets in for regular health-checks so that any problems can be picked up as early as possible.

Rabbit teeth – a growing issue!



Did you know that rabbits have unusual teeth in that they are *continually* growing? In fact their teeth are perfectly adapted to their natural diet of tough abrasive vegetation, which – without continued tooth growth, would soon result in their teeth being totally ground down to nothing!

Thus, to keep our pet bunny's teeth healthy, most of their diet should comprise of good quality hay (which is very abrasive), a small amount of fresh green leafy vegetables, and a small amount of a pelleted rabbit feed. This keeps their teeth at a healthy (short) length plus also getting all the vital nutrition they need.

However it is easy to feed too much hard food (often of the muesli kind), which bunnies often prefer, and so ignore the hay. Insufficient hay means the teeth aren't ground down and so grow too long, developing sharp spikes which tear into the mouth (see photo). Muesli type mixes also encourage *selective* feeding, leaving vital nutrients uneaten and which can lead to bone weakness. For this reason, it is better to replace the muesli mix component with pelleted food.

The good news is that feeding the correct diet, as outlined above, can go a long way to avoiding most dental problems in rabbits. For more advice, please have a chat to our team who will be very happy to advise you!

Oral exam reveals problems:



Overgrown cheek teeth (arrowed) are sharp, spikey and can lacerate the gums



Lungworm alert!

Lungworm, caused by *Angiostrongylus vasorum* is gradually becoming more common through-out the UK and Ireland. In affected dogs, clinical signs can range from a mild cough to life threatening bleeding problems.



Slugs and snails can carry the larval stage of *Angiostrongylus vasorum* and if dogs eat slugs and snails, they can become unwittingly infected. Some pets seem to have a taste for these garden dwellers but all dogs are at risk. Some species of slugs are very small and can easily be accidentally swallowed when dogs eat grass, drink from puddles or play with toys that have been left outside. The disease is commonest in young dogs that eat or play with slugs and snails.

Once swallowed, the larvae migrate to the heart where they will develop into adult



Electron micrograph of an adult lungworm

worms. The adult lungworms live in the heart and those blood vessels supplying the lungs. Here they lay their eggs, which hatch into larvae and migrate into the airways of the lungs. The dog then coughs them up, swallows the larvae, sheds them in the faeces, and the life cycle begins again.

Clinical signs of lungworm can be vague and variable – ranging from a cough or tiring more easily, to bruising easily, serious bleeding problems and even fitting.

Lungworm can be diagnosed by checking for the larvae in the faeces or by specialised blood tests. The treatment for dogs who are infected with a lungworm involves killing the parasites plus also treating the bleeding or other symptoms they may have. The latter can be challenging and, sadly, many dogs have died because of the parasite.

The good news is that prevention is straight forward with spot-on or tablet medications, both of which are highly effective.

If you are concerned about lungworm, please have a chat to our staff who will be able to advise you on the best form of preventative treatment to protect your pets.