

# HOLMER VETERINARY SURGERY



## Winter 2019 Newsletter

Welcome to our third edition to the Holmer Vet Surgery newsletter. We hope you have found the information we have provided you so far to be both interesting and informative. We are happy to receive feedback about our articles and to answer any follow on questions you might have. In addition, if you have any subjects you would like to see covered in future newsletter please let us know by emailing [info@holmervetsurgery.co.uk](mailto:info@holmervetsurgery.co.uk).

In last months newsletter we looked at advice on acquiring a new puppy. This month we look at acquiring a new cat or rabbit. We felt that, especially in the run up to Christmas, it is important to carefully consider if taking on a new pet is the right thing to do. Sadly, it is still an all too common occurrence that pets are acquired for Christmas by individuals who are not fully prepared for the commitment in time and money, the poor pets acquired often being put up for rehoming not long into the new year.

Our third article of this season looks at potential hazards our pets face over the Christmas period.

Finally everyone at Holmer Vets would like to wish all of our patients, and their owners a very Happy Christmas and all the Best for the New Year. Rest assured we will be available, as always to help you, if/when you need over the festive season.



## Festive Hazards

### Antifreeze

With the cold weather rolling in most people will be using antifreeze in their windscreen wash. Most antifreeze solutions contain ethylene glycol. Ethylene glycol is a highly toxic substance that causes severe acute kidney failure and sadly often results in death. The initial signs of ingestion and toxicity can be subtle and are easily missed. There is an antidote for ethylene glycol poisoning, however for it to be effective it needs to be given almost as soon as the animal ingests the antifreeze.

While ethylene glycol is toxic to all pets, cats are most at risk as they are likely to come in to contact with it more readily, going under car bonnets and into garages/sheds where the antifreeze is often stored. The sweet flavour of antifreeze also means that it is often a pleasant taste to animals.

Tips for trying to reduce the risk to your pets is to limit access to antifreeze as best you can, for example when topping up the windscreen wash in the car cleaning up any spills and when storing the antifreeze ensure it is out of sight in a closed container that doesn't have any leaks. Some companies now put bitterants, for example Bitrex, into the antifreeze to make it less appealing to animals.

If you suspect or have witnessed your pet ingesting antifreeze please contact the vets immediately, day or night.

### **Mince Pies, Christmas cake, Christmas pudding (Grapes, Sultanas, Raisins and Currants)**

These are all toxic to dogs if eaten. Whilst some dogs will suffer no ill effects from ingesting significant quantities of grapes (fresh or dried) in others ingestion of a small quantity can cause severe kidney failure in some dogs. It is unknown what it is in or on grapes that leads to their toxicity and there is no determined toxic quantity. If kidney failure develops it is untreatable and will lead to death.

If your dog has had access or known to have ingested grapes, sultanas, raisins or currants in any form phone the vets straight away. If your pet has eaten them within 2 hours it may be possible to induce vomiting and avoid the risk, if it is over 2 hours close monitoring of your pet's kidneys will be required and it may need intensive supportive care.

## Chocolate

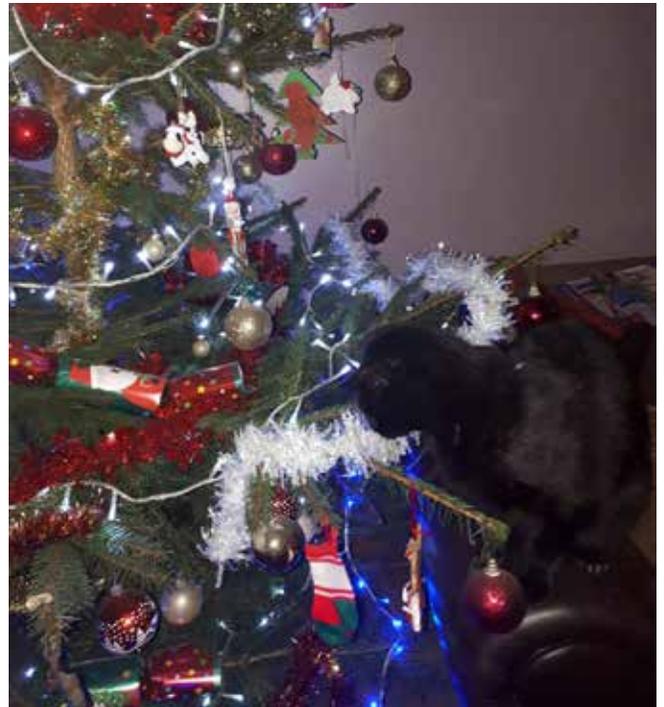
Chocolate contains a compound called theobromine which dogs do not tolerate very well, eating too much of this can cause a range of symptoms from vomiting and diarrhoea, to convulsions and problems with the heart. White chocolate generally does not represent a risk as the amount of theobromine in white chocolate is quite low. Milk chocolate if eaten in a large enough quantity can cause severe problems, dark chocolate is highly toxic and even large dogs only have to eat a small amount to be at risk of effects of toxicity.

If your pet has ingested chocolate please call the vets for advice and let them know what type of chocolate (white, milk, dark), how much they have ingested and your pet's weight, this will allow the vet to work out if your pet has eaten sufficient quantity to be a problem. If your pet has eaten enough chocolate to be of concern and it happened within the last 2 hours it may be possible to induce vomiting, using an injection, averting the risk of poisoning, however if it is over 2 hours since ingestion your pet may need to be hospitalised to reduce the risk of organ damage.

## Christmas Tree

Real Christmas trees are mildly toxic if ingested, this is because the oils on fir trees can be irritant to the mouth and stomach, causing excessive drooling and/or vomiting. Also, the needles aren't easily digested and can possibly cause gastro-intestinal irritation, vomiting or gastrointestinal blockage. With 'fake' Christmas trees the main risk comes from the pet chewing and swallowing part of the tree risking potential intestinal obstruction. While we are not suggesting abandoning Christmas trees, it may be prudent where possible to be vigilant when your pet has access to the tree.

If you are worried your pet is showing any signs mentioned above please ring the surgery and bring your pet in for a consultation.



## Tinsel

Whilst tinsel is not poisonous it is notorious amongst vets for causing a linear foreign body. When a length of something such as tinsel or string is swallowed, one end of the strand can become entangled, whilst the other end continues to be pulled along by normal intestinal movement. The linear foreign body can cut through the gut wall, causing major damage to the portion of intestines involved and peritonitis (a severe life threatening infection in the abdomen). Removing a linear foreign body requires major abdominal surgery and is not without significant risk. Symptoms seen may include vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain/discomfort, prayer positioning (stretching front legs out in front whilst holding bottom up in the air), lethargy and no interest in food. If you notice some tinsel hanging from your pet's bottom do not pull it as you may inadvertently cause serious damage.

If you have seen your pet playing with tinsel and/or is showing any of the symptoms listed above please phone the vets for advice. To try and reduce the risk don't encourage your pet to play with tinsel, where possible avoid using tinsel in areas of the house where the pet may gain access to it.



## Poinsettia

A common house plant available during the festive period. It has a reputation of being toxic, however it only has a very low level of toxin compared to other Euphorbia species. Cats that chew the plant may show signs of gastric irritation. Symptoms may include vomiting, hypersalivation, anorexia, lethargy and depression. The symptoms are usually self-limiting, but if severe vomiting develops some supportive care may be required.

If your pet has eaten some poinsettia and is showing any of the signs listed above please phone the vets for advice.

## Cough, Cold and Flu medications

There are a wide range of products available to help treat the symptoms of coughs, colds and flu. Products contain a variety of ingredients from painkillers, decongestants, caffeine and antihistamines. Some of these can be very toxic to pets.

If you know or suspect your pet has eaten or had access to any of these products please call the vets straight away and have the product packet to hand so the ingredients can be determined. If you are advised to bring your pet to the vets take the packaging with you.

## Adopting a rescue cat

The Cats Protection (CP) last year estimated that there were 9 million stray cats in the UK and 1.5 million feral cats. Each year CP are estimated to help 200,000 cats a year, which is more than 500 cats and kittens a day. Although the CP are one of the largest charities working to improve the welfare of cats, they are but one of many charities with cats and kittens looking for homes.



When considering taking on any new pet it is important to do your research, to carefully consider if you can offer the right environment and care for a new pet, not least to be sure you will be able to afford ongoing expenses of food and veterinary care, both routine and non-routine

(treatment of illness or injury). For rescue animals it may be that they come with a pre-existing condition/s or may just need a longer time to adapt to a new environment.

As a general rule cats are solitary animals, who naturally will only be found in a group where there is a desired resource e.g. food, shelter etc. Unless cats are raised together, individual cats, especially those introduced as adults, will rarely bond (with signs of mutual grooming and sleeping together). In multi-cat households it is quite common for the cats to be in different social groups, where individual cats may be socially independent. Cats between groups may tolerate each other as long as there is no competition for resources, or there may be adverse interactions (hissing, spitting or fighting). Stressed individuals are potentially predisposed to anxiety related behaviours (urine spraying, inappropriate scratching of furniture or human directed aggression) or stress related medical disorders

(Feline idiopathic cystitis, psychogenic over-grooming). Stress related behaviours and/or disorders can be seen in any cat with issues with their environment or health, but are more commonly seen in multi-cat households, or where new cats, particularly rescue cats, are not offered an appropriate environment or time to adjust to their new home.

Having said all this re-homing a cat can be an amazing experience, but it illustrates that, from the outset, a new owner needs to carefully prepare to take on a new rescue cat. If there are already cats in the household are there enough resources- places to eat, drink, sleep, time for human interaction (if they want it!), room to exercise particularly if they are going to be a house cat? If there are one or more dogs in the house will they be tolerant of a cat/s, can they be trusted not to cause injury? When taking on any new cat a quiet space/room where they have access to all the resources they need, where they can adjust undisturbed by other household pets for as long as they need, is recommended; when they decide they are ready to venture further they are allowed to do so in their own time (this may take a few days or years!)



Aside from being sure you are prepared to take on a new rescue cat, it is worth thinking about the type of cat you would be willing to adopt. Certain cats are more difficult to rehome: those with medical conditions, those who are elderly, shy or anxious cats and (somewhat bizarrely) black cats. Historically cats with FIV or FeLV (Feline Aids and Feline Leukaemia respectively) were euthanized when they were identified, but more current understanding of the diseases has shown that clinically well FIV positive cats often have a life expectancy equal to that of non-infected cats, and FeLV cats can also live many happy healthy years.



Cats from rescue centres may be more likely to be exposed to organisms generally referred to as cat flu including Calicivirus (FCV), Herpes virus (FHV), Chlamydia and Bordetella bronchoseptica. Some cats exposed to FCV and FHV never clear the viruses and so can become latent carriers, these cats, particularly when stressed may redevelop symptoms and shed virus, despite this most of these cats live long happy lives. Pre-existing diseases of cats including diabetes, chronic renal disease and hyperthyroidism can all be relatively easily managed if an owner has the willingness, the time and the finances.

Ultimately there is a lot to consider when taking on a new cat, be they a purchased new kitten or a rescue cat or kitten. There are so many deserving felines looking for a new home, such that, if a new owner is willing to accept and work through potential issues, allow a new cat time to find his/her own feet in their new environment, and accept that they may not ever chose to be a cuddly lap cat, rehoming a stray cat can be a most rewarding experience.

If you would like to discuss any issues mentioned in this article please feel free to contact us at Holmer Vets. Further information about rehoming rescue cats is also available on the Cats Protection ([www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)) and RSPCA ([www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)) websites.

## Rehoming or Buying a Pet Rabbit

Rabbits are now the third most popular pet in the U.K but are also among the most neglected and abused. It is important that prospective new owners carefully considered whether they will be able to fulfil and maintain the specific needs before buying or rehoming a rabbit. Whilst historically rabbits have, perhaps, been considered the ideal first pet for a child, their specific welfare needs means this idea should be reconsidered. Children will always need adult supervision to care for a rabbit and should never be given the sole responsibility of caring or looking after one. The human-rabbit bond can be a lengthy process to build and takes patience. Unfortunately, in some cases new owners especially children lose patience in this process leading to the rabbit being cared for incorrectly or being re-homed. Rescue shelters for rehoming rabbits can be readily found. By choosing a rescue shelter you will be helping a rabbit in need, many shelters also have some expertise in pairing rabbits together so can offer you great advice on choosing the right rabbit for you.

If you are specifically looking to buy or rehome a baby rabbit they are usually ready to leave their mother and be re-homed from 8 weeks of age. Rabbits should be brought in pairs unless being acquired to bond with an existing lonely rabbit.

### Housing/Welfare

Rabbits are traditionally thought of as outdoor pets; however it is becoming more and more common for rabbits to be kept as 'house rabbits'. It is important to provide pet rabbits with the necessary exercise if they are housed indoors, but more importantly if they are housed outdoors in a hutch. Rabbits are highly active animals so daily exercise is vital, without the correct amount of exercise rabbits can develop painful skeletal problems, they can also suffer psychological problems through boredom which in turn will affect their physical health.

A rabbit's hutch should only be used as a shelter or a bedroom, never the sole accommodation. A shed or a large hutch with an exercise run permanently attached is highly recommended. As rabbits are most active at dusk and dawn this gives them the opportunity to display their natural behaviour, it also allows them to decide when they want to exercise, play or take shelter.



When choosing your exercise run carefully decide where about in the garden the run will be situated, rabbit runs should allow your rabbit to display their natural behaviours such as digging, burrowing, grazing, hiding, jumping and running. When choosing a hutch for your rabbit, size is a big factor! The hutch should be big enough for a rabbit to take 3 hops and be able to stretch fully upright. It is recommended that a hutch should be no smaller than 6ft long x 2ft wide x 2ft tall, with an attached exercise run of 8ft long, 6ft wide and 3ft tall. Rabbit living indoors will need a living area of at least 10ft x 6ft x 3ft.

## Diet

A rabbit's diet is often one of the main attributes to poor health and illness, therefore feeding your pet rabbit correctly is highly important. Around 85% of a rabbit's diet should consist of 'feeding hay' (feeding hay should be dry, sweet smelling and free from grit dust and mould) or grass, 10% of their diet should consist of greens/veggies (this does not include carrots as they should be viewed as more of a treat rather than a main dietary component) and only 5% of their diet should consist of pellet/dry food. Hay and grass provide long fibre which help to maintain healthy gut movement and also helps to keep the rabbit's teeth, which constantly grow to be worn down, avoiding painful and potentially life threatening dental issues.



Pellet or nugget dry rabbit food is the recommended food supplement for rabbits. Multicoloured pick and mix type food is not recommended as it tends to encourage selective feeding which results in a poorly balanced diet. Only a small portion of dry food should be offered to rabbits to supplement their hay/grass diet, overfeeding rabbit food can lead to obesity and subsequent health issues. Rabbits enjoy fruits such as; apple, grapes and strawberries, however due to their high sugar content fruit should only be fed as a treat rather than every day.

Never change your rabbit's dry diet suddenly as this can trigger fatal digestive upsets, if you are thinking of changing your rabbit's dry food it is best to gradually introduce the new food along with the old over a period of 1-2 weeks to allow the body time to adjust to the change.

## Vaccinations

Rabbits need to be vaccinated against Myxomatosis and RVHD (Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease) types 1 and 2.

These are two separate vaccinations given once a year, usually around the end of winter/early spring time. Rabbit vaccinations can be started from 6 weeks of age.

## Neutering

If you are not intending to breed your rabbits it is strongly advised to have one or both of them neutered. Neutering means surgically removing the rabbit's reproductive organs to prevent them from mating and management of some behavioural issues. In males this is termed 'castration' and in females 'spaying'. Both of these procedures are carried out under a general anaesthetic. Both male and female rabbits are suitable to be neutered from 5 months of age.

Please feel free to contact one of our vets or qualified nurses if you feel you would like further advice before deciding on whether to have a pet rabbit/s.