

HOLMER VETERINARY SURGERY

Summer 2021 Newsletter

Welcome to our summer 2021 newsletter. For many of us the last 18 months has felt like being in a time warp. Although the Covid pandemic still hangs over us the arrival of summer cannot help but lift our spirits just a little. You will probably be aware that we are still carrying out the majority of our consultations outside. We are in constant discussion about how, and when, we take the move to allow clients back into the practice. As a team it is felt that with the current resurgence of cases now is not the time to change our policy, however, we very much hope that in the next few months, as everyone has been offered at least their first vaccination, we will be ready to welcome you into our new improved premises. We know that our decisions will be frustrating and disappointing to some of you but we thank you for your ongoing patience and support.

With the warmer weather upon us it is time to be vigilant of the risks this time of year brings for our pets. Flea and tick activity is increased during the warmer months so we recommend you ensure you are up to date with your preventative treatments. Remember these ectoparasites are not only irritating to your pet but can also transmit disease. For rabbit owners it is important to ensure their hutch is kept clean and that they are checked regularly for evidence of fly strike. For all pets heat stroke is a real danger, with brachycephalic and old dogs particularly at risk, please ensure your pets have access to cool shaded areas, plenty of water and are exercised during the cooler parts of the day.

Having covered tick borne diseases and heatstroke in previous newsletters we thought we would take a look at some other timely topics. We have been frequently approached by owners struggling with behavioural issues in their dogs, even more so since the Covid crisis, so our first article aims to give some basic advice and reassure you that we at Holmer Vets will do all we can to help you and your pet. Our second article looks at feline inflammatory airway disease, as feline asthma can be triggered by many allergens, including pollen, cat owners may first recognise coughing and breathing difficulties in their pet at this time of year.

How to manage behavioural problems

Summer is now upon us and life is starting to move back towards normality, for most of us. A lot of people decided to get a new dog during the pandemic whilst having more time at home, but now returning to the 'office' and more normal work patterns is on the horizon there is potential to disrupt our dogs routine and cause problems. Behavioural issues such as separation anxiety, antisocial behaviour, fear-aggression etc... are becoming more common as our dogs' struggle to adapt to the new (old) way of life. The aim of this article is to give some general advice that may help to reduce/prevent issues and make owners aware that there is help available no matter how bad the problem.

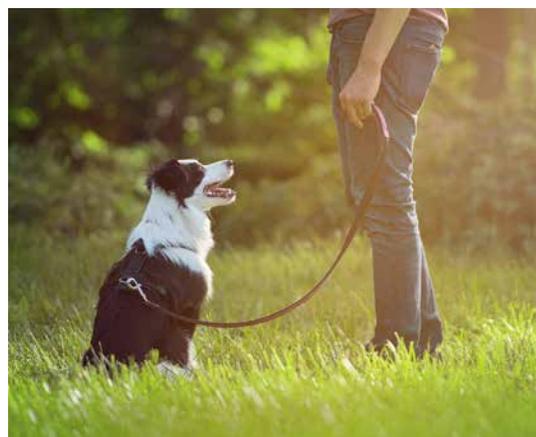
Understandably our pets have got used to having us at home, so a sudden change to working away from home can cause upset. There are some things you can do to help your dog adapt:



- Get your dog used to being left alone for short periods of time and gradually increase the time spent away through a process called desensitisation and counterconditioning.
- Try to make sure your dog is not too reliant on your attention whilst together at home so they can cope better when you are out. Try to make sure your dog has had enough exercise and stimulation before they are left to help it settle when you go out.

A lot of younger dogs had not yet had chance to interact with people and/or dogs from outside the home due to social distancing and can start to show anti-social behaviour, be over-excited or fearful when meeting new people and other dogs.

- Take it slow try to start by introducing your dog to someone experienced with dogs or with someone who has an older calm dog and give them time to get used to each other without forcing an interaction.
- Teaching your dog to be focused on you through training and positive reinforcement will help to keep them calmer when in new situations/meeting new people/dogs.



Try not to let your dog run uncontrolled with every dog you meet as they may come to expect to be able to play with every dog which can lead to frustration/over excitement when they come to be kept on a lead

We are seeing more patients for behavioural complaints than ever, whilst we are not trained behaviourist we will always try to help even if it is just pointing you in the direction of an appropriately qualified behaviourist. When looking at behaviourist to recommend we look to make sure they are registered with either the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (ABPC) or Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourists (CCAB) to ensure they have appropriate qualifications to be able to offer advice/training regarding behaviour. We have a list of behaviourists registered with either ABPC or CCAB at the surgery we can give out to owners if needed. The dogs trust has a brilliant library of resources that cover basic puppy training to preventing/managing your dog developing common behavioural issues please follow this link to find their website:

<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/behaviour/>.

There are a range of medications available to help manage behavioural problems ranging from holistic stress relief to anti-depressants, please ask to talk to one our vets if you feel your pet may need medication to help with a behavioural issue. However, it is important to note that these are not a substitute for good training and behaviour modification programs advised by an appropriate behaviourist.

Sadly there are times when a dogs behaviour can not be managed and means they are no longer able to stay with their current owner. Where appropriate we will always try to help and find the dog a more suitable environment if that is what's needed. It is an incredibly difficult decision to make to let your dog be rehomed and we will always try and support our clients as best we can, we do not make judgements on how the situation came to be but just want to ensure the best outcome for the dog or pet in question. We will always seek to pursue every avenue open to us before electing to euthanise a pet due to behavioural issues, but where a dog has demonstrated unpredictable aggression unfortunately euthanasia may be required. Severely nervous aggressive dogs can present an unmanageable risk of injury to their owners and the general public. Where this is the case we will support owners in making the difficult decision and try to make it as painless as possible.

Please remember we are always here and will always try to help no matter how bad the problem is or hard the solution may be.

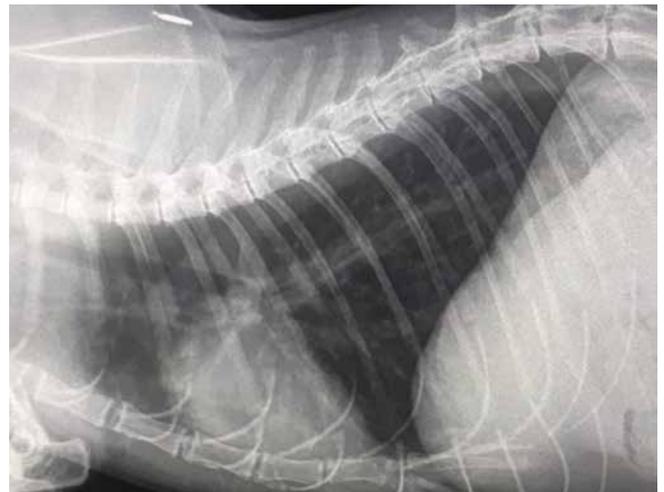
Feline inflammatory airway disease

Coughing in cats is most commonly seen with feline asthma and chronic bronchial disease (CBD), other possible causes include fur balls, worm migration in kittens and young cats, bronchopneumonia (e.g. due to infection, foreign body, aspiration) and lung cancer. Cats with feline lungworm may cough but usually have no symptoms and pulmonary oedema, e.g. fluid on the lungs due to heart failure, rarely causes a cough in cats.

Feline asthma and CBD are inflammatory airway diseases, asthma occurs due to allergy which can be triggered by cat litter, smoke, house dust, pollen etc.. CBD results from non-allergic airway inflammation. Neither disease is caused by infection although affected cats can be susceptible to secondary infection. Cats with inflammatory airway disease typically have a history of bouts of intermittent coughing, the frequency of which increases over time. Some cats may wheeze at rest. Affected cats often have an increased respiratory rate, in more severely affected cases cats may become dyspnoeic (increased respiratory effort, struggling to breath), irreversible lung lobe collapse can occur in very severe cases where the disease is poorly controlled.

Diagnosis

A diagnosis of feline allergic airway disease can be made on the basis of patient history, clinical signs, chest x-rays and lung washes. However, the changes seen on chest x-rays are variable and in some cases the lungs may look quite normal. Sample collected from the lung can help differentiate between asthma and CBD, as well as identify any infection.



Treatment

Where possible limiting exposure to allergy triggers can help in the management feline asthma. However, steroids are the main treatment for feline allergic airway disease, generally higher doses are needed for the treatment of asthma than CBD. Bronchodilators which help open up the airways are used in more severe cases and for management of flair ups.



Once a cat with allergic airway disease is stabilised the condition is best managed with long term medication. Steroids, and bronchodilators, can be administered orally or via an inhaler, using an inhaler to deliver the medication directly into the lungs is thought to reduce the overall exposure of the cat to steroids by up to 75% compared to oral medication, so reducing side effects.

Intermittent steroid injections can be used, where an owner is unable to medicate their cat orally or via an inhaler, but management of the airway inflammation is usually suboptimal. Feline allergic airway disease is a disease that must be managed lifelong, whilst it cannot be cured available therapies mean that affected cats can lead an otherwise happy and healthy life.