

HOLMER VETERINARY SURGERY

Autumn 2023 Newsletter

Welcome to our Autumn newsletter. It is difficult to believe how fast 2023 has flown by. Since our last newsletter we have seen Tia move over from reception to become a nursing assistant, with a view to officially starting her nurse training next year. Meanwhile we have welcomed Olivia to the reception team who has already proven herself to be a great asset to the team. We at Holmer vets continue to work hard as a team to bring our patients the best care 24/7.

In this edition of our quarterly newsletter we will follow on from our pregnancy and whelping articles with an overview on puppy care, from rearing to homing. Our second article helps to highlight the issue of obesity in cats and dogs and how we can help tackle the issue. We encourage you to look back at our [Autumn 2019 newsletter](#) if you are looking for advice on managing dogs with fear of fireworks, the second article in the newsletter on Alabama rot, also warrants a re-read, as the condition is more commonly seen in the Autumn and winter months particularly when there has been more heavy rainfall. If you have any questions or concerns relating to these or any other health concern for your pet please do not hesitate to call to speak to, or be seen by, one of our practice team.

A guide to raising and homing puppies.

Weaning

On average puppies are weaned at around 5 weeks of age, although this can be earlier in larger breeds or with larger litters. Puppies may start to show interest in the mothers' food as an indicator that they may be ready to start weaning. Weaning should be done gradually to allow both the puppies digestive systems to adjust and the mothers milk to reduce gently. To start the weaning process it is best to start with a bitch, as they will already be full. One option is to try to introduce puppies initially to milk replacer so that they become accustomed to feeding/lapping from a bowl then gradually adding in solid puppy food, wet or dry. Once the puppies are taking solid food with milk then the milk can gradually be cut out. Alternatively weaning straight to solids may be achieved by offering small amounts of tasty food in a shallow dish to entice them to try it.



Complete puppy foods are well balanced in all the correct nutrients for a growing puppy. Ideally a puppy food that is designed for the size of dog should be used, as there are slight differences for the ideal nutrients between small, medium and large breeds. Puppies can be fed wet or dried food but it is advisable to soak dry food, at least initially, to reduce the risk of choking and/or bloating. Feeding guidelines differ between food brands so always check the instructions for the diet you have chosen. Ideally the instructions will indicate a weight of food that should be fed in a 24hr period based on the dogs expected adult weight and current age. Some brands indicate how much a puppy should be fed based on current age and weight, it is best to avoid these as there is a risk an underweight puppy will be underfed and an overweight puppy will be overfed. The daily food allowance should be divided between 3-4 meals a day initially, this frequency can be reduced over time as they get bigger. Fresh water should be available at all times. New owners should be supplied with a sample of the diet fed by the breeder, if desired this can be gradually changed over to a new diet when the puppy is settled in their new home.

Any dietary change can result in a transient digestive upset, with self-limiting diarrhoea being quite common. As long as the puppy/ies is/are still bright and the diarrhoea settles in a day or two no action is required, however if the diarrhoea persists or the pup/s are unwell then the advice of a veterinarian should be sought.

Worming

Puppies can contract round worms from their mother whilst in the womb or through the milk. Round worms usually develop in the intestines and can lead to signs of diarrhoea, poor weight gain and in severe cases life-threatening intestinal blockage. Round worms also pose a risk to human health especially in young growing children. It is therefore important/recommended to worm puppies at 2 weeks of age and then every 2-3 weeks until 12 weeks of age.



Wormers are available in liquid, paste, powder or tablet forms, liquid treatments generally being the easiest and safest to use in puppies that have not yet been weaned. Spot-on formulations are available which can be used from several weeks of age and when the pup/s have achieved a specified weight. From 12 weeks puppies should then be wormed monthly until 6 months of age, after which routine worming should be every 1-3 months based on individual needs and lifestyle of the dog. In the older puppies who are on solid food and may be prone to dietary indiscretion (eating things they shouldn't!) it is important that the worming product use also covers a broader range of worms including tapeworms and lungworm. Your vet can advise you on the most appropriate worming regime for your pet.

Microchipping

Since 2015 it has been a legal requirement that puppies should be microchipped with the breeder by 8 weeks of age, which is the minimal age they can be sold/go to their new home. The microchip must fulfil government standards and should initially be registered to the breeder, the details must then be transferred over to the new owner (some companies may charge a small fee for this). It is imperative that the details linked to the microchip are kept up to date including any change in contact details as well as address, so that if the dog is lost he/she can be readily reunited with his/her owner. An owner who fails to microchip their dog or update their details is at risk of being fined up to £50.

Vaccinations

Newborn puppies acquire immune protection from their mothers both through the placenta and through ingestion of colostrum (the first of the mothers' milk). The better the dams' immunity the better protection the puppies will have. The maternal protection against infectious diseases usually begins to wane after several weeks, however maternal antibodies can remain active in some individuals for 3 or more months. Routine vaccinations are recommended to start at around 8 weeks of age to try and encourage the puppy/ies to start to develop their own immunity. A second injection is given at 12 weeks, which for a large majority of puppies is when they can properly start to mount their own immune protection, without maternal antibodies negating the response.



Some breeders will choose to give their puppies their first vaccination, before sending to a new home, others will leave it up to the new owner. Dogs are routinely vaccinated against distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus and leptospirosis, more details on these diseases can be found on our [vaccination advice page](#). Given that the maternal antibodies can persist longer than 12 weeks in some dogs the WSAVA (World Small Animal Veterinary Association) recommend a third injection be considered at 16+ weeks; this may be particularly pertinent in some breeds, including Rottweilers and Dobermanns, which have historically been considered more likely to give a weaker immune response to primary vaccinations. Primary boosters are then given at 6-12 month and then annually. The [WSAVA vaccination guidelines](#) are free to access for those interested in finding out more.

Flea and tick treatment

Heavy flea infestation can be life threatening in very small young puppies due to anaemia, although this is uncommon. If necessary, puppies can be treated with a fipronil based flea spray from 2 days of age, however this is only recommended when fleas have been diagnosed. With the current move to try and minimise the use of insecticides, due to concerns about their effects on the environment, it is important to use effective ectoparasite treatments that are tailored to the individual pet's needs and should be discussed with your vet. Indiscriminate use of potentially ineffective treatments off the shelf is not recommended.



Socialisation

It has been recognised that puppies are most adaptable to new experiences when they are less than 12 weeks of age. Ideally puppies should be exposed to as many normal daily experiences and noises as possible whilst they are with their mother e.g. vacuum cleaners, washing machines, different people etc. to help them more readily accept these things when they go to their new homes. Whilst puppies should not be walked in public areas until at least a week after their second vaccination, it is a good idea to socialise them with other dogs of different shapes and sizes, who are themselves up to date with their vaccinations, after they have had their first injection. These social meetings can be safely held in your house or secure garden, or that of the playmates owner.

Insurance

A good breeder will often sell their puppies with 4 weeks pet insurance cover. Pet insurance can be a mind field and it is important for owners to do their research. Given the ever-increasing treatment options for our beloved pets it is worth considering pet insurance to increase the accessibility to, often costly, specialist treatments if the need arises. Worthwhile pet insurance policies will have a high level of cover, as a rough guide we would suggest more than £4000 per condition per year, ideally £10,000 as a ball park, will cover most eventualities. We also recommend a lifelong/ongoing conditions policy that will continue to pay out year on year if your dog suffers from a chronic condition like diabetes or allergic skin disease.

An important note to prospective owners.

As a potential new owner firstly, it is important to ensure getting a puppy is right for you, that you fully understand, and are in a position to cope with, the long term financial and time commitment that will be needed. It is then imperative to do your research to ensure that you obtain a healthy puppy from a responsible breeder, to help ensure you are acquiring a healthy well balance puppy, using a puppy contract can help. Legally anyone who advertising or selling puppies for profit should have a breeders license, more information can be found on the gov.uk website . Further advice on buying a cat or dog can also be found the government website.

A good breeder will be happy to give you advice on what you will need to have ready for your puppy before and after purchase. It is important to have your new puppy vet checked within 48hrs of purchase, as if any significant health concerns are raised a reputable breeder will readily take the puppy back. Do not forget your vets will also be happy to offer pre-purchase advice. If you come across someone who raises your concerns that they are a puppy farm or dealing with illegally trafficked puppies you should not be afraid to raise you concerns with local authority trading standards, police 101 and/or the RSPCA.

Obesity

Obesity is something we are seeing affect our pets more and more frequently. Pets weighing more than 10% ideal weight are considered overweight and over 20% are considered obese. Some veterinary surveys suggest up to 50% of dogs and 43% of cats are considered overweight or obese.



Obesity affects a lot more than just our pets appearance, it is reported to be linked to a number of conditions and ultimately a reduced lifespan.

So what causes obesity? Animals tend to become overweight because of a higher intake of calories than used by the body, whether that be due to reduced exercise or increased food. There are a number of risk factors for obesity to include certain medications, neutered status, genetics and some medical conditions that can contribute to weight gain, such as hypothyroidism in dogs.

Conditions associated with obesity

Diabetes mellitus:

Obesity is a known risk factor for the development of diabetes mellitus, particularly in cats. Diabetes can make animals very unwell, left untreated, due to the development of diabetic ketoacidosis where ketones build up in the body, this can be fatal. Signs of diabetes can include increased thirst and urination, lethargy, increased or decreased appetite, weight loss, vomiting, collapse, you may notice a sweet smell on your pets breath. Once your pet has been diagnosed with diabetes they will likely require insulin injections and dietary management. Regular blood glucose checks will be needed to ensure the dose is appropriate adjustments may be required over time. In some cases weight loss, appropriate diet and insulin therapy can lead to cats going into diabetic remission meaning they may stop needing insulin therapy.

Osteoarthritis

Between 8-20% of dogs are estimated to suffer with osteoarthritis (OA) according to Davies veterinary specialists. Obesity is linked to exacerbation of OA likely due to increased load through the joints leading to chronic pain. Signs of OA may include exercise intolerance (where they may not want to go for a walk or not want to walk as far), lameness, swelling around the joints, stiffness, tenderness. Weight management is considered part of the treatment process for OA as appropriate weight can help slow the deterioration of the condition. Dogs with OA should have multiple short walks a day. Low impact, low intensity walks can help with strengthening muscles without causing too much stress to the joints, hydrotherapy can be a very complementary therapy for this. Obese cats and those suffering from OA are often less active and often struggle to groom themselves appropriately predisposing them to matting around their back and backend and may require having matts shaved. If you suspect your pet is suffering from osteoarthritis then you should contact your veterinary surgeon for an assessment and advice for management. Appropriate pain relief will make your pet more comfortable and more willing to move about more and so can be an aid to weight loss.



Respiratory Conditions

Obesity is thought to exacerbate respiratory conditions such as laryngeal paralysis and tracheal collapse, these conditions can lead to respiratory crisis and be fatal. Brachycephalic patients such as bulldogs, French Bulldogs, Persian cats especially those suffering from BOAS (Brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome) can have particularly noisy, raspy breathing which will often worsen with obesity, this can be life threatening. Overweight and obese pets are also at a higher risk of suffering from heat stroke in warmer weather as they are less effective at cooling themselves down.

Body condition scoring (BCS)

So what size should my pet be? A hands on assessment is needed to assess fat coverage. Ideally we should be able to easily palpate the ribs with a mild fat coverage and see a waist line and abdominal tuck (See Royal Canin charts below). Our dogs and cats should be between a score of 4 / 5 out of 9. BCS is preferred to assess our pets rather than weight alone, as even the same breed may have variability in ideal weight. BCS will also help differentiate patients who have become overweight from those who have put on weight, according to the scales, but actually lost body condition due to illness.



What can we do to manage obesity?

- Regularly weighing pets can allow us to monitor weight and make early interventions by recognising unwanted weight gain or weight loss, which may require veterinary interventions.
- Prescription diets tailored to weight loss; these diets are balanced with reduced calories designed to aid in controlled weight loss. Daily requirements should be measured and are best fed at set meal times rather than fed ad-lib and slow feeders can also be encouraged. Using a slow feeder may help our greedier pets eat slower and feel more satisfied.
- Do not feed table scrap, these are often very rich and fatty, and likely to significantly contribute to weight gain, they may also cause gastrointestinal upsets. Left over human food may also be high in salt, contain garlic, onions, raisins, chocolate and potentially sweeteners such as xylitol which can be extremely toxic to dogs, some of which can be fatal if consumed. Some dogs will access human food through scavenging, it is important to try and prevent this by securing bins and/or loose food away and out of reach. Unwanted scavenging can have dire consequences as not only can they eat high calorie foods and potentially expose themselves to toxic substances, there is also a risk of the pet ingesting something that could cause an intestinal blockage or perforation.
- Nurse clinics. Enlisting the help of a veterinary nurse at our practice can be a great way to help you along your pets' weight loss journey. During our weight loss appointments we will discuss dietary habits, exercise, treat intake as well as other symptoms. Where appropriate we may advise a vet appointment due to management or investigations of other symptoms. We will work with you to make a diet and exercise plan with achievable weight goals and regular reviews.
- Exercise. For dogs regular exercise, little and often is better than infrequent long walks, especially when they are suffering joint issues. Overweight patients might not be able to walk very far at first but should be able to more as their condition improves. Giving cat small meals in different locations around the house, as well as using toys to encourage hunting behaviours can be good ways to get them to increase their daily activity.

Managing a healthy weight for your pet will improve their quality of life and can help increase their life expectancy. If you have any concerns about your pets weight please speak to your veterinary practice team.

If you are interested in finding out further information on some of the areas covered in the article please click on the following links:

- [Overweight dogs may have shorter lives - Waltham](#)
- [Health risks of overweight cats -Royal](#)
- [Canin Feline Obesity - iCatcare](#)
- [Weight management and diabetes](#)