

# WINGHAM & VALLEY VETS

Small Animal Newsletter

June 2017

Volume 2

## *Cold Comfort: Arthritis Management in Winter*

Arthritis is extremely common in older pets and signs of arthritis can be very subtle, despite significant discomfort. The cooler weather can make stiff and sore joints less limber and more painful and so Winter is the time when pets suffer most from arthritis.

pain when touched, reduced appetite and a change in personality (including aggression). The disease often develops slowly so signs are often misattributed to old age. However, arthritis is a disease process and fortunately,

*Signs of arthritis are often attributed to old age and as a result, many pets are not getting adequate pain relief*

### *What causes arthritis?*

Arthritis or degenerative joint disease is inflammation within the joint, usually due to an old injury or the gradual wearing down of cartilage with time. The joint fluid becomes thin and watery and, combined with cartilage loss, results in increased friction and chronic pain when the dog or cat moves. In the worst cases, the bones will rub together and the pain is severe. Overweight pets and those with joint conformation problems are more prone to arthritis.

### *Signs of arthritis*

Signs can include limping or stiffness (especially in the mornings), difficulty rising, climbing stairs or jumping into the car, reduced activity, incontinence, reluctance to exercise or play, lagging behind on walks, licking or chewing at joints, yelping in

there are many different treatments and pain relief options. Due to its gradual and insidious onset, many pets go undiagnosed for long periods and are effectively suffering in silence. If your cat or dog is displaying any of the above symptoms, it may be time for a checkup. Unfortunately, arthritis frequently goes undiagnosed in cats because, being sedentary creatures, they will simply lie around and sleep more when painful, and so it is less obvious to owners. Although arthritic joint change is permanent and cannot be completely cured, it can be effectively managed. There are treatments available to reduce the pain and inflammation, as well as to improve the quality of the joint fluid and help rebuild cartilage.

## *Cases of the Month*

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Fanconi Syndrome

Osteoarthritis

Tick Paralysis

Grass seed problems

Pyometra

Leptospirosis

Rat Bait Toxicity

Feline AIDS

Anal Sac Abscess

## *Puppy Preschool*

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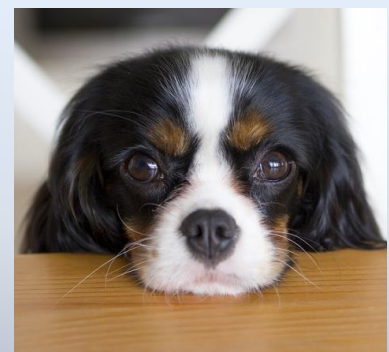
Next class starts 17<sup>th</sup> June

Fun & Informative

Competitively priced

4 week classes on Saturday mornings run by qualified dog trainers who have undertaken further study in animal behavior.

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## Weight Control

If your dog is overweight, the joints must bear increased load, which accelerates the damage to the cartilage and worsens pain and discomfort. It is imperative that weight is kept under control and in many cases, weight loss alone through diet can greatly improve quality of life. Reduced meal sizes and low-calorie diets help, but you may need to cut out food treats. If your dog is arthritic and very overweight, addressing this can provide a significant improvement in comfort and quality of life. We can advise you on how to reduce your dog's weight and will also cover this in future newsletters.

## Environment

Bedding is very important and it is vital that it provides both padding and warmth. The bed should be up off the cold floor and away from draughts. If a kennel is used then it must provide reliable protection from wind and rain. Good padding will prevent excess pressure being applied to the joints. Also, try to reduce the number of stairs or the steepness of slope that your dog must use.

## Exercise

Exercise in moderation is very important. An arthritic dog may not be able to cope with very long walks and strenuous exercise will strain already inflamed joints. However, insufficient exercise will lead to greater stiffness and muscle wastage. Gentle regular exercise is best as this keeps the joints moving and prevents muscle wastage. Daily gentle lead walks or swimming as part

of a balanced exercise program are ideal. In advanced cases, gentle physiotherapy can be helpful.

## Pain Relief

Synovan is effective and safe for arthritis management, with minimal side effects. Synovan provides pain relief and treats the disease process which causes arthritis - not just the symptoms. By providing cartilage building blocks, it works on improving the cartilage and fluid inside the joints, reducing friction and pain. A course of 4 injections over 4 weeks can provide a whole year of relief - reducing or eliminating the need for other drugs. Severely affected dogs may require boosters every 1-3 months.

NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) can provide immediate and ongoing pain relief for moderately to severely arthritic animals. The newer generation NSAIDs are highly effective with a high safety margin. **Do not** give human pain-killers such as Ibuprofen to dogs as this will cause severe illness.

## Natural Supplements

Anecdotally, products such as shark cartilage, green-lipped mussel and anti-oxidants may help. Hills j/d diet has been formulated to provide relief for arthritic dogs by incorporating some of these ingredients into the dry food and results so far are promising. With any of these supplements however, owners cannot expect the same level of pain relief (and therefore improvement) as they would see with a daily NSAID or Synovan course.

## In the Spotlight Staff Continuing Education



Some exciting news for the clinic and our patients: this year Pete is embarking on a 10 month advanced course in cardiorespiratory medicine through the University of Sydney. The course is designed to improve vets' diagnostic and clinical skills for conditions from nasal disease to lung and heart disease. We see a lot of older animals with complicated chest pathology and we are so grateful to have a dedicated vet like Pete taking on this extra study to deliver the best outcomes for our clients and patients. This extra knowledge is the perfect accompaniment to Pete's special interest in echocardiology (heart ultrasound). Pete will be hard at work this year, with several weekend workshops and regular assignments - all part of Wingham and Valley Vets' commitment to providing outstanding quality care for our patients!!



### *In the spotlight: Leptospirosis*



Recently we saw a case of suspected Leptospirosis in a pig hunting dog. Leptospirosis is a very severe disease, transmissible to people, and since the Leptospira bacteria are shed in infected dogs' urine in high numbers, these dogs pose a significant health risk to their owners. Hunting dogs are at increased risk of contracting Leptospirosis because feral pigs commonly carry the infection and dogs become infected by close contact with the pigs or by eating infected tissue. Also, dogs on farms (especially Dairies – Leptospira thrive in wet conditions) are at increased risk. We recommend Leptospirosis vaccination for any pig hunting or dairy farm dogs to protect them from infection and by extension, protect their owners. We would also strongly recommend 7 in 1 vaccination of Dairy cattle to minimise the risk of exposure to farmers. Symptoms of Leptospirosis in dogs include: high fever, vomiting, inappetence, blood in the urine, lethargy, jaundice and depression. With treatment, survival rate can be up to 80%, without treatment, death usually results.



Figure 1: Leptospira bacteria under the microscope.

### *Forging a lasting bond – the importance of behaviour management through Adolescence*

In dogs, Adolescence is the critical developmental period between approximately 4 and 18 months of age, when many difficult behaviours emerge. Without appropriate intervention and behaviour management, these behaviours can become reinforced as the young dog enters adulthood, creating an enduring problem for owners and affecting their bonding relationship. Our Canine Teens Program is specially designed for adolescent dogs aged between 4 and 18 months old and is a fantastic training foundation if your dog missed puppy school or if you have recently adopted an adolescent dog. It can also be a great follow on from puppy school and is a fantastic opportunity for owners to continue training and socialising their "Canine Teen" in a calm, supportive and controlled environment. Our aim at Wingham and Valley Vets is for all our loving dog owners to have positive, rewarding and fulfilling relationships with their beloved pets. Classes are tailored to the individual needs of both the owner and their dog and by using positive reinforcement methods, owners will learn how to keep their dog calm and focused to build a lasting bond together. Also, should you wish to enter our Canine Good Citizen Program, our Canine Teens classes can be a fantastic foundation. The Canine Teens Program consists of five 1 hour lessons once weekly, usually on a Sunday morning. The program is run by a dedicated instructor with many years' experience in

behaviour modification and training. To find out more or to enrol in our Canine Teens Program, please contact us on 65570000.

## *Small Animal Services*

Fully Equipped Hospital  
Advanced Anaesthetic Monitoring  
Orthopaedic & Soft Tissue Surgery  
In-house Biochemistry & Haematology  
Dentistry & Dental X-ray  
Ultrasonography  
Digital Radiography  
Behaviour & Training  
Puppy Preschool  
Grooming

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