



General healthcare for Dogs

This page is written to provide general healthcare information for your pet dog. It is only written as a guide and if you have any concerns with regards to your dog's health then you must seek advice from a veterinary surgeon.

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Diet

To keep your dog healthy it is important you feed the right diet. Complete dry dog food diets are convenient to feed and if you feed a complete diet this will provide everything your dog needs. They also help to reduce tartar build up on teeth due to the abrasive action of the kibble when chewed. There are many commercial complete dog foods available, so it is often the case of finding which suits your dog best and which they enjoy eating. Wet food diets are often well liked by dogs and a lot of owners like to feed a combination of these and biscuit mixer; the latter should not be confused with a complete diet as adding wet food to a complete diet will imbalance it and lead to ingestion of far too many calories than your pet needs. There are also a number of veterinary prescription diets that can be used to treat conditions such as diabetes, cystitis and renal disease. If you feel your dog would benefit from one of these diets please speak with your veterinary surgeon. It is also important that your dog always has access to fresh water; some owners increase their dog's water intake but adding water to their dry food diet.

Obesity

Obesity is becoming a problem in dogs and cats, usually as a result of well-intentioned over-feeding. Obesity can be associated with variety of diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. It is important to address obesity before it becomes excessive and our nurses at the clinic run free weight loss clinics for our clients. Please contact them to book an appointment for advice.

Grooming

Grooming is required daily in dogs with long coats to prevent their coat becoming matted. There are a variety of grooming brushes that can be bought from pet shops to aid grooming any type of dog coat. Some breeds require their coat to be clipped especially in the summer months; there are many dog groomers locally who can carry this out for you. Dogs do not require regular shampooing unless they have a skin condition which requires medicated shampoo. They should not be bathed more than once a month routinely and it can be left until the dog's coat smells or just carried out when they are particularly dirty. There are a



great number of dog shampoos that are available from the pet shop, but please speak to your veterinary surgeon if you feel a medicated shampoo is required for your dog.

Claw clipping

Claw clipping may be required from time to time, although some dogs may never need them doing due to natural wear. Many dogs dislike their claws being clipped so it is sensible when you have a puppy to get them used to having their feet handled from an early age. Claws can be clipped at the surgery by the nurses or can be done at home by the owner. If you would like any advice on this please do not hesitate to speak to one of our nurses.

Teeth

Puppies will lose their temporary teeth at 3-7 months of age depending on the breed. These teeth can sometimes be found on the floor and/or there may be a little bit of blood seen in the dog's mouth. Many dogs swallow their teeth and they will never be seen. If your puppy has a loose tooth, do not wobble it or pull it out; it will come out on its own in the following few days.

There are many products available to prevent and reduce plaque build-up on your dog's teeth; these include toothbrushes and toothpaste, chews and specialist diets. By reducing plaque they reduce the formation of dental disease later in life.

Fleas & Ticks

These are both common complaints of pet dogs. Adult fleas live on the dog and feed from the bloodstream by biting. Ticks are small blood sucking parasites which can attach to the dogs skin and are generally picked up in areas of long grass.

Many dogs are simply infested with **fleas** which cause them minor skin irritation; these dogs can have many fleas on them but the level of scratching is low. However, a number of dogs are allergic to flea saliva and so are more obviously affected. Their skin becomes very inflamed and itchy; this can lead to extensive hair loss and skin damage from scratching and over-grooming. It can sometimes be difficult to identify fleas on these dogs as it can take just a couple of bites to set off the allergic reaction and therefore they do not need to be heavily infested. It is important to treat all the dogs and cats in the house as, whilst some may not scratch, these individuals are likely to harbour fleas for the animals which are more severely affected.

Ticks enlarge as they suck blood and can often be mistaken for a rapidly enlarging skin growth. Ticks can carry certain diseases. The tick will eventually drop off after a few days of feeding and isolated ticks can be left to drop off. Alternatively, our nurses can remove the tick for you and teach you how to do so with a tick remover. Often a small firm nodule is left



by the tick and this will usually resolve with time. Occasionally, these can become infected and require examination by a vet for a course of antibiotics. For tick removal or prevention, please speak to one of our nurses at the surgery.

Intestinal worms

Intestinal worms can be carried by dogs and cats. There are two main groups, roundworms (*Toxocara*) and tapeworms. Roundworms are most common in puppies but can be carried by adult dogs and excreted in their faeces. Roundworms pose a small but serious concern for human health with children most at risk. It is not possible to tell which animals are excreting the disease as the eggs are microscopic, so it is recommended you treat your dog quarterly. There are three types of tapeworm: *Dipylidium* is picked up from fleas, *Taenia* are acquired from eating hunted prey or raw meat. Whilst neither of these presents a human health risk, it is recommended to treat your dog quarterly. The final tapeworm *Echinococcus* does present a human health risk but is thankfully of a very low prevalence in the South East of England. There are many worm treatment products available at our clinic including tablets and spot-on preparations, so please discuss with our nurses or vets which product is most suitable for your dog.

Vaccinating Dogs

Dogs should be vaccinated against Parvovirus, Distemper, Infectious Hepatitis, Leptospirosis and Kennel cough.

Parvovirus: This virus is contracted orally and attacks the gastrointestinal system and bone marrow, leading to severe vomiting and diarrhoea with immune suppression. The disease is rapidly fatal and, even with medical treatment and support, the animal often cannot be saved. It is most commonly seen in young dogs and puppies.

Distemper: This disease attacks all the epithelial linings of the body which includes the skin, conjunctiva, the lining of the gastrointestinal and respiratory tract and genital and urinary tracts. The brain can also become damaged.

Infectious hepatitis: This infection causes destruction of the liver leading to liver failure. The liver is a vital organ and performs many functions within the body; this disease can also lead to coma and is usually fatal despite treatment.

Leptospirosis : This is a bacterial disease most commonly contracted from contact with infected urine; the infected urine is produced by rats and is found in ditches, ponds and lakes. Rats carry the disease without it causing illness and they excrete it in their urine so that the environment is contaminated. When the bacteria are dispersed into water they become more infectious. The disease leads to kidney and liver failure and most cases are fatal despite treatment. Vaccination provides protection from two strains of leptospirosis.



Kennel Cough: This is a less severe disease and is generally not serious unless contracted by very young, geriatric or immunocompromised patients. Kennel cough is highly contagious though and spreads anywhere dogs meet, not just in kennels.

Puppy vaccinations comprise of two injections given at 8 and 10 weeks of age. If puppies are older than this the two injections must just be given two weeks apart. Puppies are vaccinated against all 5 diseases.

The first annual booster is given one year later and comprises of all 5 components. Thereafter, parvovirus, distemper and hepatitis vaccines are only given every 3 years. Leptospirosis and kennel cough vaccine are required annually to be effective.

In recent years there has been a lot of debate in the press with regards to vaccinating dogs annually. We believe in the continued importance of vaccination and use the vaccines in accordance with the most current scientific literature and manufacturers' recommendations. We continually review our policies based on emerging data in order to be able to reassure our clients that they are receiving the most up to date advice. If you would like to discuss this further then please contact the surgery and speak to one of our vets.

Neutering Dogs

Both dogs and bitches can be neutered from 6 months of age. As there are many factors involved as to when to neuter an individual, we would advise discussing this with one of our veterinary surgeons so you can be given advice tailored to your own dog.

Further Information:

Please do not hesitate to contact us at the practice if you would like to discuss any area of your dog's healthcare with our nurses or vets.