



SMALL TALK



THE NEWSLETTER FROM THE SMALL ANIMAL TEAM - ISSUE # 49

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De-sexing guidelines for cats and dogs

After reviewing recent overseas studies we have reassessed our recommendations around de-sexing cats and dogs.

Kittens: Female kittens can get pregnant as early as 5 months old. A pregnancy is very hard on them given the fact that at this age they are still growing and need to direct most of their energy requirements in to this. Male kittens as they become sexually active often begin to roam and are more likely to fight. Because of these factors it is better to de-sex kittens at a young age. We recommend performing the procedure when they have reached 2kg. At this weight the anaesthetic risk is reduced and you are far less likely to get unwanted kittens. De-sexed cats have a two and a half year longer life expectancy than entire cats.

Large breed male dogs: The recommended age to get these dogs castrated is 15 to 18 months. With large breed dogs their growth has to be carefully regulated in order to avoid getting bone and joint problems later in life. The two biggest contributors to this is the age at which they are de-sexed and ensuring they are fed a large breed puppy food. We don't want to perform the castration too late in life however due to the possibility of your dog developing unfavourable entire male behavior such as aggression and roaming.

Large breed female dogs: The age recommended in females is less than that in males, around 8-9 months of age. Again we want to de-sex our large breeds later than smaller dogs due to their bone and joint development. However, female dogs have an increased chance of breast/mammary cancer with each heat they are allowed to have. In studies performed the risk of developing breast cancer increases from 0.5% to 8%, and to 26%, depending on whether the spay is performed before the first, second, or any heat thereafter, respectively.

Small and medium breed dogs (both male and female): We recommend de-sexing all other dogs at around 6 months of age. Usually females will not have had a heat by this age thus decreasing their risk significantly of breast cancer, but also allowing enough time for their bladder to fully develop, decreasing their chance of urinary issues down the track. At 6 months the anaesthetic risk is reduced for both males and females.

Hungry, thirsty, crazy cats!!!

One of the most common problems we see in cats is hyperthyroidism—an overactive thyroid gland. It is usually a middle to old age cat disorder with the average age of onset being around 13 years. Thyroid hormone regulates the body's rate of metabolism and when this hormone is over produced there is an increased metabolic rate. Because of this we tend to see some characteristic signs; your cat may have an increased appetite but despite eating more food it may start losing a lot of weight. Other signs which may be shown include frequent vomiting, increased drinking and urination, hyperactivity and an unkempt coat. Other diseases such as kidney failure can look very similar and some cats can have both hyperthyroid and kidney failure at the same time!!! If you do notice any of the above signs in your older cat make sure you take them to the vet. We will often take a blood test to check for both hyperthyroid and kidney issues or if anything else is causing the signs.

Hyperthyroidism is a manageable disorder with different options for treatment. If you are in a single cat household it may be possible to manage with a special prescription diet. A lot of people prefer to use a topical medication which is given daily rubbed into the ear. If your cat is compliant there is the option for daily tablets but unfortunately these are unable to be crushed. If your cat is an appropriate candidate it may be possible to do a one off treatment called radioactive iodine which is curative in around 90-95% of cases but is only performed in Dunedin. Your veterinarian can discuss these options in detail once your cat has been diagnosed.



Case of the month: Marley the cat who lost his meow

Marley is a 1 year old domestic medium hair cat who presented for bleeding from the mouth and nose while struggling to breathe. On examination he had nerve damage to the right side of his head which affected his eye and made him unable to feel his face when touched. Given his presentation it was suspected he had trauma of unknown cause. Multiple x-rays were taken which showed his lungs and gut were all normal but revealed that his upper jaw was fractured along the centre so his top teeth did not line up. The bottom jaw appeared to still be intact.

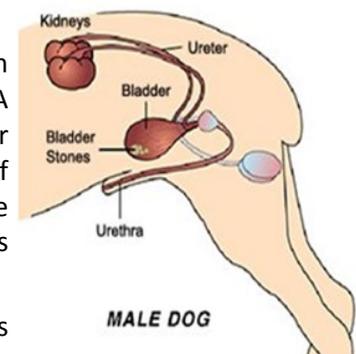


Marley was taken to surgery and the bones in his skull realigned. A wire was placed across the fracture site to keep the skull in place once repositioned. A feeding tube was placed at the time of surgery as it was uncertain whether Marley would be able to eat initially after surgery. Marley stayed in hospital with us for around 2 weeks and in this time we saw him improve significantly. To begin with he was not meowing or swallowing with his mouth held wide open due to nerve damage. After 3 days Marley had his meow back. After 6 days he could close his affected eye. After a week he could swallow but his mouth was still open so he could not eat by himself. Marley went home with his feeding tube still in place and his owners were shown how to feed him through this. After about a week he was eating by himself and his lower jaw was able to close!!! Thanks to Marley's owners patience he is doing well at home and will be due back in a few weeks time to get the wire removed.

Bladder stones – The uncomfortable truth

When our beloved canine companion begins to have difficulty urinating, this can not only be a cause of concern for the dog itself but also the brand new carpet. A dog which develops problems with urination can show signs such as difficult or painful urination, frequent urination, urination of small amounts, or production of bloody or cloudy urine. When this occurs in our dogs we may consider that there is an infection present but did you know that dogs can develop bladder stones similar to humans?

These stones develop when there is an excessive amount of urinary crystals (containing magnesium, ammonium or phosphate) within the urine that form stones. Stones can be present anywhere within the urinary system, including the bladder and kidneys, and are most common in small breed dogs such as the Miniature Schnauzer, Shih Tzu, Bichon Frise, and Miniature Poodle, but also occur in large breed dogs such as the Dalmatian. Causes of stone formation can include dietary reasons, previous urinary tract infections or urine retention in the bladder.



So if your canine companion is having difficulty urinating or appears to be in discomfort, visit us at the clinic and we can perform a thorough examination, as well as an analysis of the urine, or take radiographs to determine whether there are any nasty stones present.

If we were to diagnose your dog with urinary stones, medical management may be an option, such as a change in diet in combination with antibiotic treatment. However if the stone is large or obstruction occurs, surgical removal may be necessary. For long term management a dietary change would then be required.

A Parrot and a ship.....

A magician worked on a cruise ship in the Caribbean. The audience would be different each week, so the magician did the same tricks each week. However, there was a problem, the captain's parrot saw the shows each week and began to understand how the magician did every trick. Once he understood, he started shouting out the secrets in the middle of the show, "Look, it's not the same hat." "Look, he is hiding the flowers under the table." "Hey, why are all the cards the Ace of Spades?" The magician was furious but couldn't do anything, it was, after all, the captain's parrot. One day, the ship had an accident and sank. The magician found himself with the parrot, adrift on a piece of wood, in the middle of the ocean. They stared at each other with hatred, but did not utter a word. This went on for a day, then another, and another. Finally, after a week, the parrot said, "Okay, I give up. Where the heck is the boat?"

