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SPRING PAWS



More Than Just Spring In The Air....

Those who suffer from hay fever or allergies will no doubt be dreading the impending change of season. With an abundance of allergens in the environment and conditions ripe for increased flea activity, some of our pets may also be about to face their most miserable time of the year. Let's take a closer look...



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Due to the anatomical structure of canine and feline ear canals, there's a good chance that they may experience an infection at some stage. Some breeds are more prone to ear infections and many owners are often unaware that there's a problem until the condition is quite advanced. Are you checking your pet's ears often enough?

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DOG TRAINING CLASSES AT NORTH GEELONG VET CLINIC

“Paw-fect Puppies”

Age: 8-16 weeks old
Wednesday 7pm – 8pm
Start on first Wednesday of the month.
Course duration: 4 weeks.
Cost: \$60

“Terr-ific Toddlers”

Age: 4-7 months old
Thursday 7pm – 8pm
Start on first Thursday of the month.
Course duration: 4 weeks.
Cost: \$80

The courses are taken by a dog trainer with more than 20 years of experience training dogs. A vet also gives a talk each week.

Eight Is The New Sixty

Ageing is a sad part of life – not only for us, but for our pets as well. Joints begin to wear out, lumps and bumps might start to appear, muzzles turn grey, nap time is precious, teeth have seen better days and fur becomes unkempt. While it's not possible to stop the ageing process, owners can employ a number of strategies to ensure the optimal health of older pets.

According to Dr Julia Larsson, Veterinarian at North Geelong Vet Clinic, many owners aren't aware of the age at which their pet is considered senior. 'This is particularly the case for first-time owners. Although people understand that the life expectancy of domestic pets is nowhere near that of humans, they don't make the connection that their pets therefore become 'old' at a relatively early age,' Dr Julia explains.

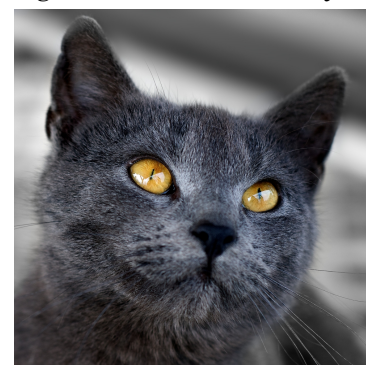
You've probably heard that one human year is the equivalent of seven dog years. However, Dr Julia says that this isn't entirely accurate. 'In fact, the relationship between human and dog years is not linear so we can't define an exact equivalent,' she says. 'There are a number of factors at play, the main one being the breed of dog in question as small dogs usually outlive larger breeds. This doesn't apply to cats because there's much less variance in their size. However, as a general rule, when a dog or cat turns eight years old, they are officially a senior citizen – even if they don't act their age! And it may even be earlier than this for giant dog breeds.'



‘...it's an opportune time to start paying closer attention to the health of your pet.’

But don't despair when your pet reaches this milestone, Dr Julia says. 'This doesn't necessarily mean that the end is near. Rather it's an opportune time to start paying closer attention to the health of your pet. Investigating problems as soon as they are noticed and incorporating preventative health checks are paramount. It goes without saying that prevention is better than cure. However, the next best scenario is to begin treatment as early as possible. If some conditions are left to progress, we may be left with no treatment options for the owner. 'Owners know their pets best so if they notice something unusual, they should get it checked out for peace of mind. Ideally your veterinarian will confirm that there's nothing to be concerned about, particularly if your pet is up to date with vaccinations and regular health checks. However, if there's any doubt, they may recommend further investigation as not everything can be detected on a physical examination.'

Dr Julia advises twice yearly health checks for all senior pets. 'Once they reach this stage of their life, we know they've got a higher chance of developing health issues,' she says. 'During their younger days, an annual check with their vaccination is fine, but it should become more frequent from eight years of age. It's also a good idea to have a blood test performed yearly as some conditions affect the internal body systems.' Dr Julia adds that your veterinarian will also advise whether any lifestyle modifications are required to align with your pet's activity and nutritional needs.



More Than Just Spring In The Air....

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North Geelong Vet Clinic's Veterinarian Dr Sally Upham says that pets with seasonal allergies tend to present with skin problems, rather than respiratory signs like humans. 'As soon as the warmer weather starts, we notice a spike in the number of cases involving skin irritation or inflammation, and possibly secondary infection. This is known as dermatitis. Clinical signs can include redness, hair loss, crusting, discharge, pustules, and even ulceration.'

Skin allergies can be some of the most frustrating conditions to treat – for pet, owner and veterinarian, says Dr Sally. 'The key to diagnosis and treatment is working with the owner to gather a comprehensive history and then performing a thorough physical examination. We may also take some skin samples to examine under the microscope or send to the lab for further analysis.'

A common cause of dermatitis in pets is a hypersensitivity reaction to flea bites, says Dr Sally. 'The only definitive way to exclude flea allergy dermatitis is to use an effective flea control product every month, such as Comfortis®, Revolution®, Advocate®, Advantage® or Frontline plus®. If flea control isn't being used, then we recommend that it be started straight away. Owners also need to be aware that it can take several months after initiating flea control before the fleas are completely eliminated.'



Skin allergies can be one of the most frustrating conditions to treat – for pet, owner and veterinarian

If fleas have been excluded then the problem can become a little more complex, Dr Sally continues. 'Due to the often multifactorial nature of allergies, there may not be an easy answer. Dogs or cats that are sensitive to airborne allergens such as pollens, dust or mould have a condition called atopy, which is caused by a dysfunctional immune system. Affected animals are often seen chewing at their paws, rubbing faces along the ground and scratching at their tummies. These animals can be extremely uncomfortable.'

Atopy is different to a food or contact allergy, says Dr Sally. 'While food allergies are not very common, they can be relatively easy to rule out by feeding a special hypoallergenic diet for a minimum of eight weeks. Contact allergy is commonly associated with a plant called Wandering Jew but can occur with other plants or sometimes chemicals. Both of these conditions can occur at any time during the year while atopy tends to be worst during warmer weather.'



Wandering Jew

Depending on the diagnosis, treatment for dermatitis may include anti-inflammatories, antibiotics, medicated shampoos, special foods and immunosuppressive therapies, says Dr Sally. 'It's extremely important to bring your pet back for a review if recommended by your veterinarian. If treatment is not successful or the condition recurs and an underlying cause cannot be determined, referral to an animal dermatologist may be warranted.'

North Geelong
Veterinary Clinic
Opening Hours:

Mon to Fri 8am – 7pm
Saturday 8am – 1pm

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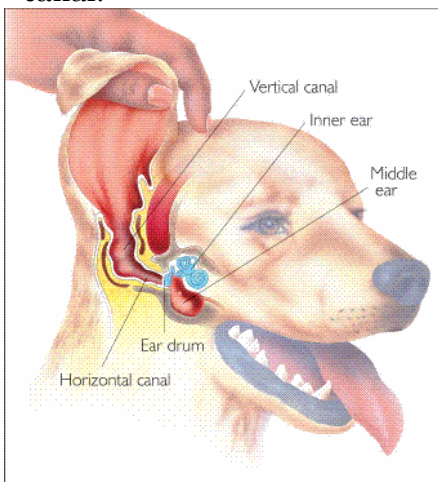
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They're All Ears

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Senior Nurse at North Geelong Veterinary Clinic, Jane, says that ear infections are one of the most common problems diagnosed in small animal practice. 'Human ear canals are relatively short and straight. On the other hand, dogs and cats have a longer, almost L-shaped canal, which limits air flow and creates a moist environment – perfect for bacteria and yeast to grow. And it's generally worse in floppy-eared breeds or animals with hairy ear canals. Pets with skin allergies are also prone to ear infections.' There are a number of clues that indicate your pet may have an ear infection, Jane says. 'Your dog or cat may be scratching or pawing at the ear, shaking their head or rubbing their face/ear along the ground. The ear may also have an odour and discharge. If not picked up early, infections can progress quickly and cause significant tissue changes, such as a thickened and narrowed ear canal.'



'Owners should check their pet's ears on a regular basis – once a week would be ideal'

Veterinarians use a special piece of equipment to thoroughly examine the ear canal, says Jane. 'They will also take a sample of discharge to check for ear mites, bacteria, yeast and inflammatory cells. These diagnostic tests will inform the most appropriate treatment to use. Depending on

the severity of the infection, this might include ear cleaner, medicated ear drops and sometimes even systemic medications. Follow-up visits to your vet are vital to ensure that the infection has resolved before stopping treatment'.

'The consequences of delayed or inadequate treatment can be catastrophic – tissue damage to the ear canal is often the beginning of a vicious cycle of ear infections. Sometimes the damage is so severe that surgery is required. Owners should check their pet's ears on a regular basis – once a week would be ideal. If any redness, discharge or pain is detected, make sure you get them checked by your veterinarian as soon as possible.'

Signs your pet may have an ear infection

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scratching or pawing at the ear • Rubbing the face/ear on the floor or on furniture • Hair loss around the ear • Shaking or tilting the head | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discharge, redness, swelling, crusting of the ear • An odour from the ear • Loss of balance • Walking in circles • Loss of hearing |
|---|--|

Meet The Vet



Dr Julia Larsson BVSc (Hons)

Qualifications: Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine with Honours from The Royal Veterinary College, University of London, in 2006

As a student, I loved: The variety of fun that living in London can provide, even when you're on a student budget.

If I were an animal, I would be: A very pampered pet cat.

My pets: A hand-reared rescue kitten from Wales who is now a very pampered pet cat, a ball-obsessed Blue Heeler who has been to Scotland and back, and a home-made, warm-blood gelding who hasn't yet made it to Australia.

The pet I would recommend for a young family is: Rats- they are easy to care for and very sociable, but as with any animal the playtime must always be supervised!

I love being a vet because: there is always something new to learn. And I get to cuddle baby animals on a daily basis!

I recently learned that: Galloway is an Australian term for an equine that falls between a pony and a horse in height.

Something you don't know about me is: When I go to Ikea I skip the furniture section and head straight for the Swedish Food Market.

Coffee or tea: Neither! Fruit infusions or hot chocolate.

Did you know: Most adult dogs have 42 teeth in their mouth.

My most challenging case was: A Dalmatian bitch with sudden-onset diabetes and pyometra (womb infection) that required hourly insulin injections during the night and surgery the following day on very little sleep!

I once treated a: Koala for kidney failure.

The secret to a happy pet is: Catering for its individual needs, whether that means leaving the anti-social cat alone or keeping the working dog constantly stimulated. Nobody likes stress!