

## PRACTICE NEWS

### Abbey Vets – Surgical Expertise

Congratulations to Gary Champken MRCVS for his RCVS Certificate in Small Animal Surgery. Gained with a distinction, Gary has been confirmed as the practice swot and is available for consultations at Abergavenny and Tredegar in his chosen special interest of surgery in addition to his general practitioner role.

**Will you be our friend?** Ever aware that we are in an internet age we have a new website – [www.abbeyvets.co.uk](http://www.abbeyvets.co.uk) We are also on twitter @abbeyvets and use our branch Facebook pages ([abbeyvet](#) and [abbeyvetstredegar](#) and [abbey-vets-brecon](#)) to discuss pet health issues, update our friends on patients without owners, such as the latest on our wildlife casualties, and providing a highly effective lost and found service. Please be our Facebook friend – visit us online and join the fun!

**Practice of the Year** Thank you very much for our nomination for the Pet Plan 'Practice of the Year Awards'. For five years running we have been nominated as one of the top Welsh veterinary practices for companion animals. We shall find out in April if we have made it to the UK finals once again! Also congratulations to the individuals at Abbey who were singled out for individual awards. Good Luck!

**What is SAVSNET?** Abbey Veterinary Centres are proud to be part of a UK small animal disease monitoring initiative run by the British Small Animal Veterinary Association and the University of Liverpool named SAVSNET (Small Animal Veterinarian surveillance NETwork).

The data we provide is used to monitor disease trends in the UK pet population. A consultation creates anonymised data such as age, breed, gender, neuter status, vaccination status, and treatments. It can be used to identify populations at risk and the monitoring of treatments and outcomes. The data is also a resource for veterinary academics. If you have any questions about SAVSNET or wish to not provide data please tell us at any consultation.

## How healthy are your pet's teeth?

Did you know that dental problems are probably the most common issue our pets suffer from, and yet they are also one of the most underdiagnosed, mainly because it is difficult to look properly in their mouths and also bad breath is often considered 'normal'?! However, it most certainly is not!



Poor dental health is painful, causes tooth loss, and infections can spread throughout the body – potentially causing significant organ damage. So, it is important for us to regularly check your pet's mouth and instigate a care regime at home to ensure their teeth and gums stay in good condition.

A healthy mouth typically has bright white teeth and pink (or pigmented) gums. However, over time, accumulation of plaque bacteria on the surface of the teeth leads to inflammation of the gums – a condition called **gingivitis** (also called gum disease). At this stage you might notice reddened gums, bad breath and some accumulation of calculus on the tooth surface (Figure 2).

If the condition is allowed to continue unchecked, bacteria will penetrate below the gum line, destroying the tooth supporting structures – a painful condition called **periodontitis**. If left untreated, this leads to tooth loosening and eventual tooth loss.



Cats may also be affected by gingivitis, but as well as this they may also suffer from one or more **tooth resorptive lesions**. Here the tooth is progressively destroyed, leading to exposure of the nerve.

These often appear as little pink spots on the teeth themselves and usually hide painful cavities in the underlying tooth, although cats will frequently show no obvious outward signs of tooth ache.

**So what can be done?** The good news is that if gum problems are identified at an *early* stage, a combination of a Scale and Polish and ongoing Home Care can make a real difference to your pet's oral health (and also their breath!). Please contact us today for a dental check-up for your pet!

### The progression of gum disease in pets:



Figure 1: Healthy mouth



Figure 2: Gingivitis with early calculus



Figure 3: Periodontitis with very inflamed and receding gums

Cap photo: Jane Barton

## Kennel Cough – is your dog vaccinated?



Kennel cough is a highly infectious, but rarely life-threatening, respiratory infection that can spread from dog to dog wherever they socialise – in kennels, at dog training, dog shows or just out on walks.

Affected pets usually develop a harsh "honking" cough, which often sounds as if they have got something stuck in their throats (but don't worry – this is very rare!). Other symptoms include loss of appetite and breathlessness. In the worst cases, dogs may cough for weeks and some may get more serious complications such as pneumonia.

The condition is caused by a mixture of viruses and one particular bacterium – *Bordetella Bronchiseptica*. Although your pet's regular booster vaccinations should provide protection against the *viral* components of the cough, only an annual vaccination with intranasal drops can offer protection against *Bordetella*. So – don't take any chances with this distressing cough – make sure your pet is vaccinated. Please contact us today for further information or to book an appointment!

## Spring time itches – is your pet affected?

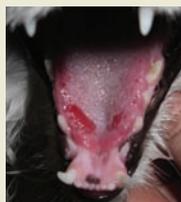


### Cats: Toxic alert!

Cats are uniquely vulnerable to poisons due to their curious nature, outdoor access, tendency to groom contaminants from their coats and feet, and their unique physiology which means they struggle to rid themselves of some poisons.

The most common causes of poisoning include **lilies**, **permethrin** (a chemical in dog flea products, which should never be applied to cats), **ethylene glycol** (antifreeze, found in car radiators, screen washes and de-icers), **benzalkonium chloride** (found in disinfectants and patio cleaners), **paracetamol** (highly toxic to cats) and **white spirit** or turpentine.

For lilies (*Lilium* species and *Hermercallis*) the pollen, leaves and petals are all toxic – even drinking from the vase can make cats very unwell. Other toxins cause less serious but still unpleasant signs, for example benzalkonium chloride found in many disinfectants, can cause severe ulceration of the mouth and tongue as shown in the picture (right).



Signs of poisoning can often be vague so owners should be vigilant when it comes to their cat's health. So contact us at once if you notice any signs of unusual behaviour or illness. Some of the most common causes of poisoning: lilies and antifreeze, cause severe kidney damage in very small quantities, so vigilance is needed.

Last year **International Cat Care** ([www.icatcare.org](http://www.icatcare.org)) launched their 'Keeping Cats Safe' campaign to promote awareness of substances that are poisonous to cats. For more information and advice on keeping your cat safe visit:

<http://icatcare.org/about-us/our-campaigns/keeping-cats-safe>.

Spring has arrived! However, although most of us look forward to the warmer weather, the budding trees and the colour returning to our gardens, it can herald the start of 'itchy season' and misery for sensitive pets, especially dogs.

Many animals will start to lick or scratch themselves at this time of year. It is their version of hay fever but while we react to the pollens going up our noses and into our eyes, they are affected by them simply contacting with the skin. This is why the most commonly affected areas of the body are those close to the ground or often in contact with foliage, such as the feet, tummy and ears.

Once the skin flares and the dog starts to bother at it, the situation quickly escalates (this is known as the itch/scratch cycle) and inflamed, red, sore and infected areas will appear. There is often a change in the coat colour, most often on the feet, to a reddish-brown colour. This is staining from the saliva because of the excessive licking. It is most obvious on lighter coloured dogs and is another thing to look out for.

Diagnosis of allergies can be tricky, but blood tests and skin testing can help us to identify substances in the environment that individual animals are allergic to. Common culprits include various pollens, fleas and housedust mites.

When treating this condition we need medication to reduce the itching, combat any infections introduced by scratching or licking, and also to reduce the exposure to allergens if possible. It is also essential to keep up your anti-parasitic treatments to ensure that parasites are not playing a role in causing the itching! Longer term treatments may include attempting to identify the underlying cause of the allergy (see above) and then creating a 'vaccine' to gradually desensitise the pet to the allergy and this can prove helpful in many dogs.

So – if your pet is plagued by itchy skin, please come and see us. Although allergies are usually managed rather than totally cured, modern medications can make our pets' lives a lot happier.



Paw chewing in a dog: Discoloured hair is a sign of excessive grooming.

## Fact File: chronic kidney disease



Kidney disease is one of the most common conditions our pets, especially cats, face. It is irreversible and progressive. However, if caught early enough, treatment can be very successful at slowing the destruction of the kidney cells; increasing both the length and quality of life.

The early signs of kidney disease are subtle. They include weight loss, a reduced appetite and an increased thirst. As the condition worsens, the pet may start to vomit, develop bad breath and other even more severe symptoms.

The condition is triggered by a slow death of the cells in the kidneys, called nephrons. However, the body has an excess of these, so no symptoms or abnormal test results become apparent until at least 70% of them have been destroyed. This is why chronic kidney disease is such a challenging problem; by the time it is discovered the process is already well underway.

However, once we have passed that point, the diagnosis is easily made using standard blood and urine tests and checking your pet's blood pressure may also be recommended.

The body cannot replace dead nephrons, so treatment is aimed at supporting those that remain and slowing any further destruction. The mainstay is a dietary change to a prescription food. This provides targeted nutrition for the kidney and reduces toxins in the bloodstream, which are very damaging. In addition we can prescribe medications to control blood pressure and excessive stomach acid, food additives to bind toxins and replace vital, lost vitamins and, for some animals, regular fluid administration under the skin helps combat the chronic dehydration.

If you are concerned that your dog or cat may be showing any signs of kidney disease (such as increased thirst or weight loss), please contact us for a check-up.