

SPRING 2007

# Your Vet

## Seasonal atopy may be the cause of your dog's scratching

Atopy can be regarded as the canine equivalent of hay fever in humans. It is a seasonal allergic reaction to substances such as inhaled pollens, house dust mites and animal danders (tiny particles of saliva, skin, fur etc).

However, whilst humans respond with sneezing and runny noses, animals show their allergic reaction by itching and licking. Atopy can be genetic (inherited). It is more common in certain breeds such as West Highland White Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers and Golden Retrievers.

Dogs with atopy usually have itchy ears, feet, armpits and groins. Some dogs may just have recurrent ear infections or an obsession with licking between their toes. Atopy often starts in spring and summer and gets worse each year. Eventually the itching may become a year-round problem. A lot of scratching often leads to secondary infections with yeast and bacteria, which further contribute to the animal's itchiness.

Your pet's symptoms will help the vet establish if atopy is a likely cause of its itchiness. If necessary the diagnosis can be confirmed through allergy testing. This may involve a blood test or an intradermal skin test. Allergy testing is complex and needs to be specific to your geographical area, so your vet may need to refer you to a specialist veterinary dermatologist. If the substance (*allergen*) causing the itchiness

can be identified, a specific vaccine can be made up for your animal. This is administered in gradually increasing doses to try and desensitise your pet and reduce its itchy response to the allergen.

Atopy rarely goes away completely and it is likely that your pet will need at least intermittent treatment for the rest of its life. Medications such as corticosteroids, antihistamines, essential fatty acids, antibiotics and medicated shampoos can all be used in various combinations to help reduce the itchiness and keep your pet comfortable.

Regular checkups with your vet will help determine the appropriate treatment and also make sure there are no concurrent problems such as fleas or food allergy.



## What colours do they see?

Many people wonder how animals view the world around them. Is it in shades of grey, or do they see the vibrant colours that our eyes can detect? Plenty of evidence now suggests that cats and dogs do see in colour, but without the vividness and wide colour spectrum available to the human eye. Animals live in a more pastel world.

The reason for this difference lies at the back of the eye, an area called the *retina*. Here special cells, known as rods and cones, are found. The sensitivity and ratio of these cells is different in animals when compared to humans, resulting in highly efficient vision in dim lighting with a narrower colour range. Dogs see mainly yellow and blue hues and can differentiate between shades of grey so subtle that they

would appear as one colour to us. Cats see some colours but their speciality is vision in low light, where their eye is up to 130 times more efficient than ours. Both dogs and cats have difficulty seeing close objects but their sense of smell and taste more than compensate.



- The queen is calling
- Scents as signatures
- Fascinating ferrets

inside

### CITY BEACH Veterinarians

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#### Our Vets

**DR NEVILLE ROBERTSON**  
BSc(Syd), MVS(Murd)

**DR ALAN WADE**  
BSc, BVMS(Murd)

#### Our Nurses

**Debra** and **Toni** are our full time qualified and registered nurses. We also have three veterinary students, **Brooke**, **Sarah** and **Jenna**, who work as nurses during weekends and holidays. Our nurses are all caring and compassionate people and are committed to looking after you and your pet.

#### Our Hours

**Monday to Friday** 7.30am to 7pm  
**Saturday** 8.30am to 4pm  
**Sunday** 10am to 1pm

Consultations are by appointment.  
We are closed on Public Holidays.

#### After Hours

For urgent attention after hours including Public Holidays contact either Murdoch Pet Emergency Centre (MPEC) on 1300 652 494 or Northern Suburbs Emergency Centre on 9345 4644.

#### Feedback

We aim to provide a modern hospital with up to date knowledge and skills combined with a caring and compassionate service. We would like to hear from you if you have any thoughts or comments on our service - just email or call us.



## A cat's fate - feline aortic thromboembolism

*Aortic thromboembolism* (ATE) strikes cats without warning. The affected cat may seem to have been severely injured or paralysed. Frightened cat owners often think their pet has been hit by a car.

ATE happens when a large blood clot (thrombus) passes along (embolises) the aorta – the main artery from the heart. The clot usually lodges where the aorta divides into two, supplying blood to each of the back legs. A large clot can block the blood supply to both legs. A smaller clot may just affect one leg.

The blockage stops the supply of nutrients and oxygen to the muscles. The cat cannot use its legs and may appear to be paralysed, and unable to move its lower body. The condition is very painful. The cat may scream in agony, making diagnosis difficult. Middle-aged and older male cats are most likely to be affected.

Such blood clots usually develop as a result of a heart condition. Sometimes an over-active thyroid gland or a dietary deficiency of Taurine may be responsible. These problems can sometimes be detected before they cause problems. Thus it is wise for your cat to have a full clinical examination at least every 12 months (with annual vaccination), and perhaps every six months for middle aged and older pets.

ATE requires intensive treatment, usually with fluids and drugs to 'thin' the blood and relieve pain. Many cats will not survive, but early treatment gives them the best chance. If you suspect ATE seek urgent help, even in the middle of the night.



## Build a condominium for your cat

In most states many local councils are imposing much stricter regulations on cats. This is understandable. Feral cats (descended from stray domestic cats but physically bigger and stronger) cause untold damage to native wildlife in rural and semi-rural areas. Even our domestic pets can do a lot of local damage if they are prone to hunting.

Many experts advocate indoor night-time curfews for cats. This would work well if cats behaved like dogs and came when they were called. However we know this is not the case. Cats soon get wise to our methods of entrapment and it can be almost impossible to keep them in at night.

One solution is to purpose-build or modify your home to include a cat-run. This allows your cat to be indoors at night, enjoying creature comforts, and outdoors in the day, soaking up the sun, but with no risk to wildlife at either end of the day.

Also important is the fact that cats which are housed entirely indoors, or in a run, are much less likely catch infectious diseases, won't develop abscesses from fights with neighbouring cats, and cannot be hit by cars. These are three of the biggest killers of pet cats.

You can buy purpose built runs for your cat or you can make something yourself, if you are handy with a hammer. It is important to make sure that you can get into the run yourself, for cleaning purposes, and that there is plenty of shade on hot days, and sun-access on cool days. Cats love additions such as hammocks/ toys/ and ledges for lounging. They like to get up high, so even if your cat run is low on ground space, you can make up for it by building platforms in the sky. A Cat Condo!

Cat runs can directly connect to the house through a cat flap or a window. This means your cat can come and go as he or she pleases, the wildlife are safe, you sleep more soundly at night, and your cat is snug and safe 100% of the time.



## Did you know?



Dogs can hear sounds that are too faint for us to hear, and also can hear noises at a much higher frequency than we can. Their hearing is so good that they probably rely more on sound than on sight to navigate their world.

Dogs have far fewer taste buds than people -- probably fewer than 2,000. It is the smell that initially attracts them to a particular food.

Pekingese dogs were sacred to the emperors of China for more than 2,000 years. They are one of the oldest breeds of dogs in the world.

It has been established that people who own pets live longer, have less stress, and have fewer heart attacks.

'Seizure Alert' dogs can alert their owners up to an hour before the onset of an epileptic seizure.

## Don't it make your brown eyes blue

Many owners notice that their dog's eyes take on a blueish tinge as the pet get older. This is due to an ageing change in the lens of the eye. Over time the lens fibres become denser. This causes refraction of light, giving a blue appearance. This process is called *nuclear*, or *lenticular*, sclerosis. Your dog's vision will not be affected. However other more serious conditions, such as cataracts, can produce a similar appearance so it is a good idea to get your pet's eyes checked by the vet.





## The smelly end of the job

When your dog sniffs another dog's bottom, or a recently left 'deposit' in the park, what is he really smelling? Well, it's not the 'deposit' itself he is interested in inspecting, but the highly developed scent that has been left on top of it.

Dogs have two small scent sacs located in close proximity to the anus (imagine a clock-face and they would be at 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock). These sacs are often called anal glands, or more correctly anal sacs. They have a multitude of glands that produce special strong-smelling juices which are stored in the sac. When the dog passes a motion, the pressure of the faeces passing through the rectum pushes on the sacs. Their contents empty through a small opening (duct) onto the steamy pile. Each dog's scent is highly personal and remains behind as the dog wanders away. In the wild this is a highly effective territorial marker.

Problems arise if the small ducts that lead from the sac to the skin of the anus get blocked, or if the sac itself gets infected. Both these situations may cause your dog intense irritation. Symptoms of this include 'scooting' their bottom along the ground, chewing the region (including the base of the tail), or licking the bottom obsessively. Affected dogs may get depressed, go off their food, refuse to exercise, or just seem 'not right'.

The treatment for a simple blocked duct is for the sac to be carefully emptied using a gloved finger and lots of medical lubricant. A successful result will be the release of foul fishy-smelling material. Because of the smell, your pet may be removed from the consulting room prior to the sacs being emptied.

In more serious or painful cases (including total impaction, or an abscess in the sac), an anaesthetic may be required to allow careful flushing of the duct, or lancing and flushing of the abscess and instillation of medication. Some dogs have such serious problems with their anal sacs that surgery is required to remove them altogether. This is not without its risks and needs to be considered carefully.

In the case of a diseased or blocked sac, manual expression should really only be performed by a vet. However many people learn how to express their own pets' anal sacs in a non-serious situation. Some vets believe that expressing healthy sacs too often can cause duct trauma and scarring, making blockage more likely. It is hard to prove or disprove this theory. Discuss with



your vet whether to perform this procedure on a regular basis, or to leave things to nature, only intervening when there is a problem.



*Laughter is the best medicine*

### Some dog letters to heaven ...

Dear God,

When we get to Heaven, can we sit on your couch? Or is it the same old story?

If a dog barks his head off in the forest and no human hears him, is he still a bad dog?

Is it true that in Heaven, dining room tables have on-ramps?

If we come back as humans, is that good, or bad?

Are there dogs on other planets or are we alone? I have been howling at the moon and stars for a long time, but all I ever hear back is the beagle across the street!

Are there postmen in Heaven? If there are, will I still have to apologise?

May I have my testicles back?



This newsletter has been compiled with the help of Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital. Many people acknowledge the loss of a beloved pet by making a donation to the Caring for Pets Fund administered by the University's Veterinary Trust. Donors have the opportunity to place a photograph and statement on the Trust's website [www.veterinarytrust.murdoch.edu.au](http://www.veterinarytrust.murdoch.edu.au). Donations are tax deductible and should be sent to: Murdoch University Veterinary Trust, Murdoch University, South St. Murdoch WA 6150

## Spring has sprung and the Queen is calling

Queen is the rather regal name given to a female cat.

Depending on the breed, she will reach puberty at around nine months of age. Siamese queens can become sexually mature as young as four months of age whilst breeds such as the British Blue can be very slow off the mark and not reach sexual maturity until they are well over a year old.

Queens are seasonal breeders and the hormones usually start to flow in springtime. They require at least 12 hours of daylight in order to trigger this reproductive cycle. This can be falsely achieved by non-natural light and explains why queens kept indoors may cycle all year round.

Queens who are in a period of sexual receptivity are said to be 'in season' or 'calling'. Calling aptly describes their behaviour during this time, and involves loud, long vocalisations. The yowling is accompanied by rolling on the ground, rubbing around owners' legs and assuming a 'dragster' position with forequarters crouched down and hind quarters raised in the air. Many vets have had an emergency call from a distraught owner concerned that their cat is writhing in agony and many a vet has had the pleasure of being able to reassure an owner that their cat is in a hormonal haze and certainly not in pain!

Unless mated, the queen will continue to call every three weeks, although there is considerable variation between breeds. Professional breeders aside, the best way to ensure that you and your queen both have a peaceful springtime is to have her de-sexed.





## The fascinating business of ferrets

Ferrets may not appeal to everyone, but they are certainly fascinating animals. Even their names are interesting. The female is called a 'Jill', and the male a 'Hob'. When ferrets are de-sexed these names change to 'Sprite' (female) and 'Gib' (male). The collective noun for a group of ferrets is a 'Business'.

Ferrets can make interesting pets, but potential owners should know that restrictions might apply. Within Australia it is illegal to keep ferrets in Queensland and the Northern Territory. A licence is required in the ACT.

Pet ferrets are sociable animals and like to live in small groups. If handled well and 'socialised' they seldom bite. However, rather like puppies, little ones use their mouths as part of normal play and exploration.

There are many excellent large cages available for housing ferrets, but they should still have several hours play time out of the restriction of an enclosure. Due to ferrets' extremely inquisitive nature owners' homes need to be 'ferret proofed'. Ferrets will explore and squeeze themselves into all sorts of small spaces – among them recliner rockers, dishwashers, sofa springs and plumbing pipes. In addition ferrets can be thieves and will hoard the strangest things. Ferret owners have found objects such as the TV remote control, jewellery, socks and a bag of onions stashed away in their pet's secret spot. Safety in the garden can be aided by using a harness and leash.

## A tip for getting tails to heal

If your dog is prone to giving himself a 'whippy' tail injury, you will know how hard it is to get the tail to heal, and how hard it is to clean spattered blood off the wall, the fridge, the cupboards and more!

Next time your dog uses his fifth appendage a little too enthusiastically, and injures this delicate area, ask the vet to show you how to apply an old syringe case over the tip of the tail and secure it with medical tape. Often this works well to protect the tail, allowing a scab to form while still allowing air to circulate to the region and encourage healing. It may not be suitable for all pets, so be sure to talk to your vet first!

Ferrets are carnivores and need a diet high in protein and fat, with not much carbohydrate. This can be achieved by feeding them good quality kitten food and fresh meat. Their rapid metabolism means that obesity is rarely an issue. Ferrets may spend up to 18 hours a day sleeping. They make up for this by being very active during their awake period, which is usually dawn and dusk. A set early bedtime is important for ferrets as it has been shown that extended periods of light – such as sitting up with the family at night to watch television can contribute to adrenal gland disease.

Ferrets should be de-sexed at around six months of age. This helps decrease the musky odour of males and prevents oestrogen toxicity in females. Ferrets are prone to a number of serious medical problems. Just like your cat or dog they should have an annual veterinary check-up. This can be combined with the recommended annual vaccination for distemper. Owners with fevers and sniffles beware, as ferrets can contract the human flu virus.



## Let sleeping horses lie

Horses have the amazing ability to remain standing for long periods of time. They can do this because of a complex interaction of tendons, ligaments and muscles in all four legs. This is called the "stay" apparatus.

By directing their weight down their limbs, and locking their kneecaps, horses can maintain a standing position with minimal muscular effort. The rest they get in this position is not like having a deep sleep, but is probably the equivalent of a human dozing on the bus.

For a truly deep sleep, horses will lie down. This usually occurs in the dead of night and lasts a few hours.

## Practice Update

### Complete Health

City Beach Veterinarians is committed to making it easy for you to look after all of your pet's needs.

Our Complete Health packages provide all of your pet's routine preventive health care. You do not need to remember when your pet is due for any products as we mail them to you monthly!

Each Complete Health package includes

- Monthly Flea Control
- Heartworm Prevention
- Intestinal worming medication
- Annual vaccinations

By taking out a Complete Health package you will save 5% off the price you would normally pay for the products and services listed above.

There are extra rewards for being a Complete Health member. These include

- \$20 discount off every primary consultation
- Unlimited free nail clipping
- Pet food discount vouchers
- Microchipping discount (transferable)
- For dogs there are 4 free hydrobaths which include blow drying.

Complete Health means peace of mind.

### Puppy Preschool

Just like humans it is best to start training young! We run regular puppy classes that are great fun and informative. Your pup will learn to socialise with other pups, enjoy visiting us and you will start to learn the basics of training.

This is a great start to your pup's life and helps cement a long lasting relationship between you and your pet. Ask one of our nurses for more information.

### Vet Profiles:

#### Dr Neville Robertson

Neville graduated from Sydney University in 1985. He moved to WA a year later to take up a position as an Intern in Veterinary Anaesthesia at Murdoch University. Nev has completed a Masters Degree in Veterinary Science at Murdoch University and is the Australian Small Animal Veterinary Association Committee's WA representative.

#### Dr Alan Wade

Alan graduated from Murdoch University in 1988. Alan worked extensively in the United Kingdom before returning to Australia 9 years ago. He has worked in many large practices and gained significant experience dealing with complicated cases over the years.