

Passive Smoking in Pets

Exposure to smoke in the home is having a direct impact on our pets. There is a risk of ongoing cell damage and an increased risk of certain cancers. Pets spend much of their time within the home breathing in second-hand smoke and coming into contact with carcinogenic particles that can settle on the carpets and furniture.

Dogs can take in significant amounts of smoke when living in a smoking household and research shows that cats are even more affected. This may be due to the extensive self-grooming that cats do, as this would increase the number of particles taken into the body.

Our vets are very aware of the implications of passive smoking in pets and the damage that it can cause to their health. These concerns are further supported by Professor

Clare Knottenbelt, Professor of Small Animal Medicine and Oncology at Glasgow University's Small Animal Hospital. She studied the effects of smoking and the health impact it has on family dogs and cats. She stated: "We are all aware of the risks to our health of smoking and it is important we do everything we can to encourage people to stop smoking. As well as the risk to the smoker, there is the danger of second-hand smoke to others. Pet owners often do not think about the impact that smoking could have on their pets' She concluded "Whilst you can reduce the amount of smoke your pet is exposed to by smoking outdoors and by reducing the number of tobacco products smoked by the members of the household, stopping smoking completely is the best option for your pet's future health and wellbeing."



New Weight Clinics

Nearly half of the patients that we see are overweight or struggling with a weight-related condition. This can include both underweight and overweight pets and symptoms may range from high blood pressure to breathing difficulties, malnutrition, painful joints and cardiac conditions. Weight can be difficult to control and issues can be affected by a pet's age, breed, exercise routine or underlying conditions (such as hypothyroidism). They can also be caused by human overindulgence by one or more members of the family!



Despite these challenges, there are strategies that can help pet owners achieve a healthy weight in their pets in order to prevent weight-related problems arising. With this in mind, we are offering FREE weight clinics with our qualified veterinary nurses to both dogs and cats. They will be offering one-on-one consultations in order to determine the cause of any weight problem. They will then offer advice on how to help your pet reach a healthy target weight. There will be regular 'weigh-ins' and check-ups to help monitor progress, troubleshoot and stay on track. If you would like to take advantage of our Weight Clinic, please register your interest by emailing lisacw@eastcottvets.co.uk

Roxy Takes the Plunge

Congratulations to Roxy from our Client Care team who was sponsored to jump into a cold lake to be rescued by a heroic Newfoundland! She raised £342.50 (the third highest total) for Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.



Heart Murmurs

What is a heart murmur?

A heart murmur is a sound that results from turbulent blood flow within or near the heart, in the same way that a stream of water 'hisses' when you obstruct the flow from the end of a hose with your finger.

Murmurs are detected using a stethoscope but in some animals, they may be heard intermittently.

Cardiac ultrasound (echocardiography or echo) is used to determine the cause and seriousness of the murmur. In conjunction with **chest x-rays and ECG**, we can make a full diagnosis and develop a treatment plan.

What is involved in an echo examination?

An echo is usually performed in conscious patients, sometimes with light sedation, with the patient gently restrained on its side. A small area of hair is usually clipped from both 'armpit' areas. A gel is applied to the skin and a plastic probe is held against the skin. A moving, 2-dimensional image of the heart appears on the screen that enables the vet to measure a variety of parameters such as chamber size and blood flow velocities but also to track blood flow through the heart in



real time. Videos and still images are stored for evaluation. The procedure generally takes 30-40 minutes.

Heart Murmurs in Cats

How do we know if a murmur is significant?

In a recent study, 40% of cats had heart murmurs although 70% of these were not associated with significant heart disease. It is important to note that a number of cats with significant heart disease have no murmur. Some of these cats may have other signs such as "gallop" sounds or rhythm abnormalities.

Once a murmur has been detected it can be difficult to know if the murmur is associated with heart disease. Given that the murmur is likely to be detected at future vet visits, raising the same questions, we would recommend further investigation in most cases. The most accurate test is a high-quality ultrasound examination (Echo) which is performed conscious or sometimes with light sedation.

What causes a heart murmur?

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) This is the commonest heart disease seen in cats. It causes thickening and stiffening of the muscle of the ventricles. This can lead to reduced effectiveness of the heart and ultimately to heart failure or even sudden death.

Other cardiomyopathies. Other diseases of the heart muscle can also lead to murmurs.

Congenital disease. These result from abnormal development (see dogs).

Heart Murmurs in Dogs

What causes murmurs in dogs?

Degenerative Valve Disease – These are the most common murmurs that we hear and they result from the gradual thickening and nodular change over time on the atrioventricular (AV) valves, typically the left AV or Mitral valve. This condition is known as Myxomatous Mitral Valve Disease (MVD). The valve changes lead to reverse flow of blood through the valve during the heart's pumping cycle. Over time this can lead to a backlog of blood within the system and ultimately congested heart failure.

Congenital murmurs – These result from malformation in the heart during development. The defects can include narrowing of valves, holes in the heart (communications between chambers of the heart), the incomplete closure of blood vessels or malformation of valves during development. These murmurs are generally detected at a young age and can range in severity between benign and life-limiting (only a few of which can be corrected).

Flow murmurs – These are frequently heard in young puppies due to the fast, turbulent blood flow through the chambers and small blood vessels. There are no abnormalities in the heart and typically these murmurs disappear by 6 months old. Flow murmurs can also be detected in severe anaemia where the viscosity of the blood is altered.

Other murmurs – These can result from other conditions such as cardiomyopathy (weakening of the heart muscle) or endocarditis (infections of the valves). Vets will generally grade murmurs depending on how loud they are on a scale of 1 to 6, with grade 1 being the quietest.

Murmurs in Cats and Dogs Can Lead to Heart Failure

Signs of heart failure include:

- Increased breathing rate
- Coughing
- Tiredness
- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty exercising
- Fainting/collapse



MITRAL VALVE DISEASE (MVD) IN DOGS - EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS

Mitral valve disease (MVD) is the most common heart disease in dogs. The disease is encountered in all breeds, although it is most common in small to medium-sized dogs. In MVD, the valve between the two chambers on the left side of the heart becomes thick, lumpy, distorted and leaky. With each heartbeat, blood is forced through the damaged valve in the wrong direction.

MVD is a progressive disease that gets worse over time. A dog with a leaky, damaged mitral valve can live for many years without showing any symptoms apart from a heart murmur. However, for many dogs, the leak gets worse over time. As more blood flows the wrong way through the heart, the murmur gets louder and more pressure is put on the heart. To compensate, the heart must grow larger and pump harder. Eventually, there comes a point when the heart cannot cope with the additional strain any longer and fails to pump enough blood around the body. This is known as heart failure.

Exciting new developments in the treatment of MVD

Until recently no benefit could be proved in treating before signs of heart failure became evident (congestive failure). Therefore, all we could do was monitor small-breed dogs with murmurs and start treatment when signs were noticed. However, an excellent new study has clearly shown that once in any heart enlargement is detected, treatment with a drug called Pimobendan can markedly improve the overall survival time of dogs with MVD (by up to 15 months!). These findings will be greatly beneficial for both pets and their owners.

How do I know if my dog may benefit from this treatment?

If your vet detects an acquired murmur with an intensity of at least grade 3 out of 6 then it is likely that an echo examination would be beneficial in determining the stage of disease. You will be advised to book an appointment to see our cardiologist with a view to at least an echo examination.

Sometimes it transpires that the patient is not yet at **Stage B2** so a follow-up examination should be performed after a number of months. If **Stage B2** disease is diagnosed then it is likely that treatment will be advised in order to take advantages of the associated benefits in quality of life and longevity.



The Clinical Signs of MVD are graded:

- **Stage A** - No heart disease detected
- **Stage B1** - Heart disease present without any change to heart size
- **Stage B2** - Heart disease present with increase in heart size but with no signs of congestive heart failure
- **Stage C** - Heart disease with increased heart size and congestive heart failure

Pet Health Club

Save up to 30% on your pet's preventative healthcare and spread the cost with convenient monthly payments. Plus many other cost saving benefits.

Ask our Client Care team or visit our website for more information.



Pet Plan Awards

If you would like to say a special thank you to one of our team (or the team as a whole), the Pet Plan Awards nominations are now open.

Please visit www.petplan.co.uk/vetawards/ if you would like to make a nomination or collect a form at reception.

When the time comes to say goodbye

At some point it's likely we may have to make a decision and act in the best interest of our pets concerning the end of their life. Sadly, our pets have much shorter lives than us and when illness, injury, or old age affects their quality of life we may need to start thinking about letting them go, peacefully. It's important to talk it through and be guided by your vet. It helps to plan and be prepared. Euthanasia offers a peaceful and painless end to our pet's life. Sometimes people use the phrase 'put to sleep' or 'put down', but euthanasia is the correct term.

When is the right time?

Sometimes it's difficult to know how our pet is really feeling. They can't tell us if they are in pain so it's our responsibility to look for signs of any changes that suggest that their quality of life is deteriorating. You may notice your pet has become particularly withdrawn or quiet and doesn't want any physical contact or to go out. They may have stopped eating or drinking, and their toilet habits may have changed. An injury or illness may be affecting their wellbeing. To prevent further pain and unnecessary suffering it is important to talk through options with your vet who will help to guide you on the right time for making a decision about euthanasia.

Should I be there?

It's a very personal decision. If you have friends and family, talk it through. Some people prefer to be with their pet during euthanasia and others feel it's just too difficult and feel unable to stay, preferring to say goodbye afterwards. It's your decision; let the vet or vet nurse know.

What can I expect?

You may want to think about where you would prefer the euthanasia to take place. It may be at the vet surgery at an arranged time, or it may be possible for the vet to come to your home. Talk to your vet about this. You will be asked to sign a form giving your permission and the euthanasia will be carried out by a vet, often with a nurse to assist. Your vet may give a sedative first to help relax them. A small patch of fur is shaved, usually from a front leg, and an injection is gently administered into a vein. This is a high dose of anaesthetic. As the injection is given your pet will lose consciousness within seconds. Their breathing and their heart will stop. Sometimes, especially if your pet is very old or frail, or if they have had a sedative, the vet may have difficulty in locating a vein and may instead have to inject into another area of the body. If your pet is a small animal, such as a hamster or rabbit, your vet may give them anaesthetic gas first so that they are asleep for

the injection. These pets have smaller blood vessels and the injection is likely to be given into another area of the body.

What to expect afterwards?

Your pet's eyes will probably remain open, their muscles may twitch and there might be an involuntary gasp or two. These are normal reactions after a death. Your vet will make sure that euthanasia has been completed and that your pet's heart has stopped beating.

What happens next?

Before or after euthanasia you may want to consider having a small keepsake of your pet such as their collar or name tag, a paw print, or a small tuft of their fur. You may want to take your pet home to bury in the garden or use a pet cemetery. Another choice is cremation. Pets may be cremated individually or communally with others. If you arrange to have your pet cremated individually you will have the ashes returned to you in a casket to keep or scatter them in a favourite spot. A communal cremation means that you will not be able to have your pet's ashes returned. Either way, you can expect your pet will be treated with dignity and respect. Ask your vet as many questions as possible about the options available, the likely costs involved. You could also remember your pet in a special way by planting flowers or a shrub, making a special photo album, or by creating a lasting memorial online by visiting www.bluecross.org.uk

Coping with Bereavement

Support for you

It can be a time of mixed and raw emotions leading up to and following euthanasia and the death of your pet. Your pet has been a special companion and member of the family. Some people experience intense feelings of grief, similar to a human loss. Often people describe feelings of guilt or numbness over their loss and this is normal and understandable. For others, there is a sense of calm and relief. Sharing your feelings and experience with others before and after euthanasia can be helpful.

The Blue Cross Pet Bereavement Support Service is a confidential telephone and email support line service that offers emotional support and information for all ages.

For the Support line call: 0800 096 6606 - available daily from 8.30am – 8.30pm. (Some mobile networks may charge)

For email support please email: pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk - the email support line service provides support for people who prefer to write about how they are feeling.

Recommend a Friend Prize Draw

Congratulations to Mr and Mrs Maclennan with 5 month old Deerhound / Lurcher Cross Ben who have won £100 worth of Eastcott vouchers in this quarter's draw. To read more about Recommend a Friend, please visit our website or pick up a form from one of our waiting rooms.

Edison Park Clinic & Hospital

Edison Park, Dorcan Way, Swindon SN3 3FR
For Sat Nav use SN3 3RB
Mon to Fri 7am - 8pm Sat & Sun 8.30am - 8pm

Bath Road Clinic

59 Bath Road, Old Town, Swindon SN1 4AU
Mon - Fri 8.30am - 7pm Sat 9am - 12pm

Cricklade Road Clinic

6 Clive Parade, Cricklade Road, Swindon SN2 1AJ
Weekdays 8.30am - 10am and 4pm - 7pm