



household having that same reaction would be very, very small. Yet some people will worry about it to the point that they won't let us use the most effective or safest drug available for fear of a very small risk. Unlike many pet owners, I have a huge data bank of statistics in my head that helps me to evaluate risks and benefits of any treatment we recommend.

If a client had a previous pet with a certain disease or problem they are often worried about that particular thing, even though the current pet may have something completely different. We all bring our past experiences with us. We tend to assume if disease X was the answer last time it must also be the answer this time. Statistically, doctors are more likely to diagnose a disease they saw recently in another patient just because it's top of mind, so this affects us as well as you.

One of the stories in the book I am listening to is about a physician working in a busy trauma center hospital. He is an internist and his job is to stop doctors and nurses from making illogical choices. For example, he tells about a woman who was brought in after a car accident. She had multiple broken bones in her arms and legs and was headed to surgery. When hooked up to the monitors, the doctors saw an abnormal heart rhythm. The woman had told the nurses she had a history of high thyroid hormone level, which can cause abnormal heart rhythms. The surgeons asked the internist to put the patient on drugs for hyperthyroidism to address the irregular heart rhythm.

The internist refused to do it. He said they needed to think about the situation logically first. Hyperthyroidism is a rare cause of irregular heart rhythm. The only reason they jumped to thinking about it at all was because the patient had mentioned

it. On further investigation, she had rib fractures and a collapsed lung, which were the real cause of the heart abnormality. In a trauma patient with multiple broken bones, that was a

far more likely explanation but it would have been missed by the surgeons in their rush to fix the patient's other fractures. Rather than confirming the diagnosis they wanted to go straight to treatment.

It's very tempting to save money on testing and instead invest it in treatment - but if we don't know what we are treating we can't make good medical decisions or treatment plans. Even a doctor's educated guess is not sufficient, especially since we doctors are likely to have our own biases and misconceptions. That's why we have protocols - so we choose the same tests and treatments for a given presentation based on logic and forethought, and not whatever comes to mind first. We will always endeavor to treat our patients both compassionately and logically - the best of both worlds!

*Nan Boss, DVM*

## Dear Clients & Friends...

The mind is a funny thing - and endlessly interesting. I have been listening to an audio book in my car about how people make decisions and choices. We often do things or believe things that are not rational or logical, despite the evidence. We also make connections between things that are not related. This happens frequently in medicine.

So many times, clients jump to conclusions about how or why their pet became ill. Last week I had a client ask me if their dog's abnormal blood test results could be due to his glucosamine supplement. The two have nothing to do with each other but our minds want to find causes and try to make connections that explain the world. Today a client called to tell me her dog was vomiting from the allergy medication

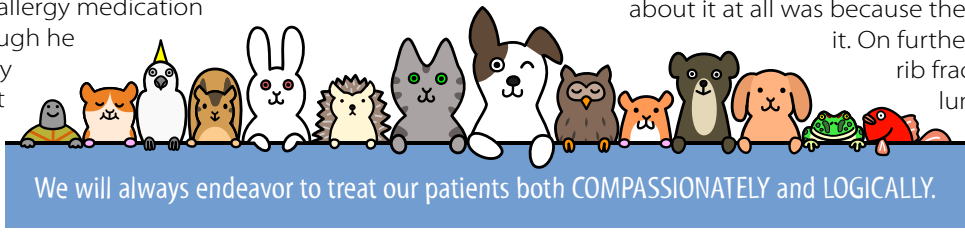
I sent home - even though he started vomiting the day before she gave the first dose of medication.

In our brains these connections somehow make sense even though

they are not necessarily logical or based on evidence. Just because a pet was taking drug X when it died does not mean that drug caused its death but the internet is full of stories about so-and-so medication killing pets. Many of these are not supported by any evidence.

Having not gone to veterinary school, pet owners may have a hard time judging the likelihood of possible diseases or causes. We were taught in veterinary school that if we hear hoof beats, it's a lot more likely that it's horses we are hearing, not zebras. "Zebras" are rare or unusual causes of disease. It's so easy to go on the internet and find information on a specific disease that you then think your pet has. Many times there is a far more common or likely explanation that you don't know about. Or you may be tempted to head way down the wrong path, pursuing a false trail. It can be very difficult to talk some people out of what they think is wrong or needs to be done once they have it in their heads.

Another manifestation of the difficulty of making choices without enough data is when a pet or a friend's pet has a side effect from a medication and then the client doesn't want to use that medication on any other animal. Sometimes that side effect is a 1 in 100 or 1 in 1000 risk. For hepatitis from carprofen (Rimadyl) it's 1 in 10,000. The chances of two pets in the same



# HERPES VIRUS UPDATE



Feline Herpesvirus, also known as Rhinotracheitis, is the most common viral disease of cats. It causes a mild disease in cats and kittens, much like the common cold in people. At least 80% of all cats have been exposed to this virus. Did you know that 90% of humans have *Herpes simplex* virus harbored in their nerve tissue from previous exposure to the *Herpes simplex* virus? Similarly, over 80% of cats, indoors or out, have been exposed and have Feline Herpesvirus in their system.

Unless a cat's immune system is compromised by feline leukemia, cancer or other problems, the initial Herpes infection that most kittens get will run its course

in a week or two. We often



treat the infection with Terramycin eye ointment and sometimes with antibiotics, to lessen the risk of secondary bacterial infections like sinusitis and pneumonia. Major disease or death from infection with Herpes is rare. However, all cats that have been infected, even mildly, harbor the virus in their systems for the rest of their lives.

When cats are stressed by other diseases or from moving to a new household, traveling, a new pet or baby in the house, or any other cause, the immune system falters and they can shed Herpesvirus from their systems again. Usually they will show no obvious signs of illness for very mild symptoms (such as a bit of sneezing or eye discharge) but the virus can be found in their tears, nasal discharge or saliva. During this reshedding time, cats are contagious to other cats and kittens. This is why kittens often catch these viruses even though the adult cat in the house, or the cats around it at a humane society or pet store, have

no symptoms of infection. They catch it from adult cats who show no symptoms at all!

Some cats *do* show symptoms when their Herpes flares up. Just as some people get repeated Herpes

cold sores from *Herpes simplex* virus in their system, some cats will repeatedly get corneal (eye) ulcers, eye discharge or have chronic (long term) sneezing or nasal congestion. The immune system keeps the infection at bay for the most part, but it can't get rid of it completely and the virus can and will flare up to cause disease. Some cats will develop eye ulcers or sneezing every time they become stressed or ill.

An amino acid supplement called lysine has been used for years to help cats with Herpesvirus but a recent large study of animal shelter cats has shown that it is not only ineffective but may actually worsen symptoms. We have stopped using L-lysine for feline Herpesvirus.

We are now using an antiviral medication called famciclovir to treat flare-ups of Herpes virus. Until recently, we didn't have a very good idea of how much to give, nor how often to give it. A new study at the veterinary school at UC

Davis showed that a dose of 90 mg/kg twice daily for 2-3 weeks, is both safe and effective for treating Herpesvirus in cats.

Famciclovir will knock the infection back down again temporarily. For long term, vaccination against it with a nasalgen (nose drop) vaccine, twice one month apart and then every six months thereafter, can rev up the immune system to better keep the virus under control. Probiotics have been shown in several studies to improve respiratory symptoms and are easy to try. The amount of bacteria in the probiotic

needs to be very high for this purpose so we recommend a specific brand that has the correct number of good bacteria and is readily accepted by cats.

There are several eye medications that can be used for eye ulcers caused by Herpesvirus, and some cats respond better to one than another. We will need to work carefully with you to find the best treatment for your cat. Antiviral eye drops are usually effective at treating Herpes eye ulcers but they are expensive and have to be given every few hours when the ulcers flare up. A relatively new choice, cidofovir, only needs to be applied twice a day, which is a great improvement. We sometimes mix up an inexpensive eye treatment containing iodine that we can try as well.

Some cats require lifetime therapy and others only need treatment in times of stress, such as before and after a dental cleaning, moving or a new addition to the household. Medication is usually tried first, but occasionally referral to a veterinary ophthalmologist is necessary for advanced treatment or surgery on a persistent ulcer.

Although vaccinations for Herpes virus in cats have been used for years they seem to have made no difference in the prevalence of respiratory disease in cats. Cats who have been vaccinated have milder symptoms and get better faster, but they still get the virus, and they still shed it later on. The new nasal vaccines seem to be more effective and work faster to protect kittens, but Herpes infection will not be eradicated in the near future. Our goal is to minimize symptoms and keep your cat as comfortable as possible.

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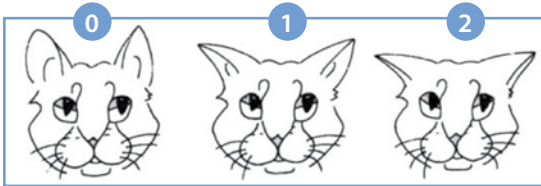
# Glasgow Feline Pain Scale



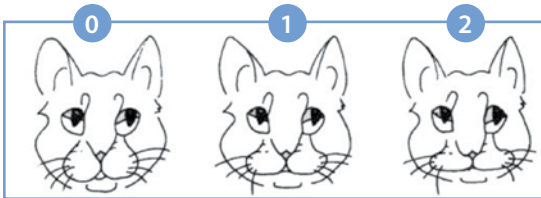
It can be very difficult to tell whether a cat is in pain or not. (Dogs are a little easier.) Careful studies have verified a new method of pain scoring for cats, using posture and facial expressions. We are now using this system to measure pain in our hospitalized patients. If your cat has dental extractions or surgery here, or if we are treating a painful condition, we will now be evaluating for pain using this method. Every patient is different as to pain tolerance and response to pain medications, so this will help us to tailor pain management specifically for your pet. Here is the system:

Observe cat. Circle the description/number for each item and add the points. If the score is >5 then the pet needs additional pain medication.

- a) Silent/purr/meow - 0 Cry/growl/roan - 1 point
- b) Relaxed - 0 Lip licking - 1 Restless/cowering - 2  
Tense/crouched - 3 Rigid/hunched - 4 points
- c) Ignoring wound/painful area - 0  
Attention to wound - 1 point
- d) Pick the ears that look most like your patient.



- e) Pick the cheek position that looks most like your patient



Now, approach the cage, call the cat by name, and stroke along his back from head to tail.

- f) Respond positively to touch - 0 Unresponsive - 1  
Aggressive - 2 points

If it has a wound or painful area, apply gentle pressure 5 cm around the site. In the absence of any painful area, apply similar pressure around the hind leg above the knee.

- g) No response - 1 Swish tail/flatten ears - 2  
Cry/hiss - 2 Growl - 3 Bite/lash out - 4 points

Your general impression of this cat

- h) Happy/content - 0 Disinterested/quiet - 1  
Anxious/afraid - 2 Dull - 3 Depressed - 4 points

PAIN SCORE \_\_\_\_/20

Intervention is needed if score is >5.

## INTESTINAL PARASITE ANTIGEN TESTING

Checking a stool sample for intestinal parasites is an important part of a regular checkup. Until recently, the only way to test was to mix stool with salt or sugar solution and let the parasite eggs rise to the top. Centrifuging the sample allowed us to detect a lot more parasites than we would find when the sample is just left alone for twenty minutes for the eggs to rise to the top slowly. But, regardless, any parasites not shedding eggs are missed with these methods.

A new method of testing has been developed by the laboratory we send most of our out-of-house tests to (Idexx Laboratory). In addition to looking for eggs we can now look for antigens, proteins shed by the parasites - using ELISA technology. (That stands for enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, if you must know.) The heartworm testing we do also uses ELISA technology, as do our tests for Giardia, feline leukemia and Parvovirus. Now we can do antigen testing for roundworms, hookworm and whipworms, too. Our lab chose to also include Giardia antigen testing in their new parasite screen.



Using this new fecal test, we expect to double the number of parasite infections we find. We also will find worms earlier in their life-stage since we can detect them without having to wait for them to mature and start shedding eggs. We don't yet have antigen testing for tapeworms, which we still diagnose mostly by seeing tapeworm segments on the stool or around the rectum of a pet. We won't be surprised if tapeworm testing is added soon!

This new test panel for intestinal parasites is surprisingly affordable, only about \$15 more than a regular stool test. It includes a regular centrifuged sample test looking for parasite eggs and adds antigen testing for roundworms, hookworms, whipworms and Giardia, which is a pretty good deal! We think an extra \$15 is a small price to pay to be assured your pet doesn't have worms crawling around inside.

We will be including the fecal panel in place of the old parasite screening method whenever we can, especially via our health care plans and for puppies and kittens, pets with diarrhea and pets with a history of parasite infestation in the past. High risk for infection, as with dogs who go to the dog park or day care, might warrant extra testing, too.

Roundworms, hookworms and Giardia can all cause illness in humans as well as dogs and cats. Having immunocompromised people living in a household with pets is also a good reason to test more carefully. This includes children under age 5, pregnant women, those over 70 years of age and anyone taking chemotherapy drugs or antirejection medication for an organ transplant, among others.

# Tick-borne Diseases

## IN WISCONSIN



Most pet owners have heard about Lyme disease but are not familiar with the other diseases ticks can carry. We usually find tick-borne disease is present in a particular pet with our heartworm test, which also screens for Lyme, Anaplasmosis and two strains of Ehrlichiosis. Rocky Mountain spotted fever is also a tick-borne disease but we have no in-house test for it. Despite the name, RMSF occurs most often in the southeastern U.S. Below is a short update on the tick-borne infections we see most often here in Wisconsin.

## Lyme Disease Updates:

Lyme disease is carried by deer ticks. Fall and winter are the peak seasons for this species. October to April are the months you should be worried about, so don't stop flea and tick preventives during the winter! Fall is when the most cases of Lyme disease are diagnosed.

Many strains of the *Borrelia burgdorferi* bacteria that cause Lyme disease are now resistant to the antibiotics we have been using for the past forty years. The new recommendation is to use a 3rd generation cephalosporin antibiotic such as cefovecin, which is administered in a two week injection, or cefpodoxime tablets.

Wondering what kind of tick you just pulled off your dog or cat? This website has excellent pictures and also lists the diseases carried by each tick, the time it takes to transmit the disease after the tick bites and other helpful information. [http://tickcounter.org/tick\\_identification/tickid\\_nonflash](http://tickcounter.org/tick_identification/tickid_nonflash)

Many dogs who become infected with Lyme disease never show obvious outward signs of infection but this does not mean they have not suffered subtle organ damage. We will test your pet's urine for kidney function if we diagnose

Lyme disease, to detect damage that can eventually cause kidney failure. The strain of Lyme we see the most in our area typically causes kidney damage but not a lot of joint inflammation. We recommend additional bloodwork as well, in case other, less common abnormalities arise, but the urine test is the most important.

A recent study of Lyme-positive dogs showed that joint damage can also be subtle. Even dogs without apparent lameness may have damage inside the joints, which will lead to early onset arthritis. This means that we may recommend antibiotic treatment if your dog tests positive for Lyme, even if he or she does not have any symptoms that we can see right now. This is a change in our protocol. The previous recommendation was to only treat for Lyme if symptoms developed.

## Anaplasmosis:

This disease, caused by *Anaplasma* bacteria, is spread by several species of ticks and is common in Wisconsin. It's the least likely of the tick-borne diseases to cause actual illness. Most dogs can handle the infection on their own, without needing antibiotics. If your dog tests positive for Anaplasmosis we will recommend a complete blood count (CBC) to look for a low platelet count, the most common symptom. (If your dog doesn't have enough platelets the blood won't clot properly and severe bleeding could result.) If the CBC is normal we usually don't need to treat for it.

As with all the tick-borne diseases, once the dog has acquired infection and tests positive the test will continue to be

positive for several years, until the immune system has completely eradicated the bacteria. If a dog acquires another tick-borne disease during this time or the pet becomes immune-compromised illness may result.

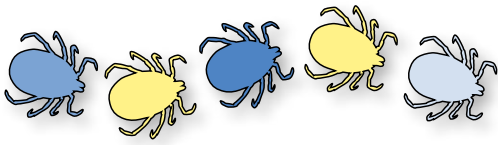
## Ehrlichiosis Becoming More Common

Ehrlichiosis (air-lick-ee-oh-sis) is the disease caused by *Ehrlichia* bacteria, which is spread to dogs via tick bites but not usually by deer ticks. Lone Star ticks are the most frequent host ticks for the disease here in Wisconsin. We have several different tick-borne diseases here and Ehrlichiosis is the most deadly. It is becoming more common in our state because Lone Star ticks have been expanding their range. In the past, the few cases we saw were in dogs that had traveled to or from the Southwestern U.S. but that's often not the case anymore.

Many, many dogs in Wisconsin test positive for Lyme disease or Anaplasmosis without developing symptoms or needing treatment. Ehrlichiosis, however, is always treated with antibiotics, even if no symptoms are present, because it is much more likely to cause serious illness.

Ehrlichia can cause fever, lameness in multiple joints, kidney disease, neurological





disorders such as seizures and coma, and/or bone marrow damage. Lyme disease can cause these symptoms as well but Lyme isn't usually as severe. For example, a dog with Lyme disease has a 43% increase in risk for kidney disease but a dog with Ehrlichiosis has a 300% increase in risk.

When we find Ehrlichia on our test we always screen for kidney damage, anemia, low platelet count and other possible abnormalities, via urine and blood testing, and we treat it with the antibiotic doxycycline. There is often a long lag period between acquiring the disease from the tick and the onset of symptoms. If we can treat an infected dog early on we can usually prevent symptoms altogether, so that's our goal.

Dogs who are infected with multiple tick-borne infections are usually the sickest. Ehrlichiosis plus Lyme disease is often a fatal combination. The immune system may be able to combat one disease but if another is added serious illness is much more likely.



Pyrethrin products made for dogs can be fatal if applied to cats. Some are so toxic that cats can die from sleeping in the same place as a dog who has been treated with them!

We have effective vaccines to protect dogs from Lyme disease but we have none for Ehrlichia, Anaplasmosis or Rocky Mountain spotted fever. To prevent these infections, use high quality tick

prevention products **all year 'round**. We don't recommend over-the-counter tick control products, as many of these are neither as effective nor as safe as prescription products. The longer a tick is attached, the higher the chance that an infectious disease will make it into the pet, so we want the tick to die and fall off within a few hours of biting your dog, and of course we want every tick to die.

## Tidbits...

Degenerative myelopathy (DM), a fairly common nerve disorder of older dogs that has a genetic cause, has been found to be closely related to ALS (Lou Goerig's Disease) in humans. Although we have a DNA test for DM, so we can tell if a dog has risk for it, we do not have a test that tells us whether a dog's symptoms are actually being caused by the DM or something else. German shepherd dogs are one of the breeds most prone to DM but they are also prone to lumbosacral spinal disease, which causes similar symptoms. A new test for DM, a modification of the current test for ALS used in humans, is under development.

Seniors who live with dogs take 38% more steps each day than seniors who don't, averaging over 10,000 steps/day. They also spent 19 fewer minutes sitting around each day.

Turmeric has been getting a lot of press lately as a therapeutic aid for its antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and anticancer effects. Unfortunately, turmeric is very poorly absorbed from the intestinal tracts of dogs and cats, so it provides little benefit. Work is underway to develop more usable forms of the spice by combining it with other substances but for now, it's not worth trying for pets.

Flax seed is marketed as a source of fatty acids for pets and it appears on the ingredient lists of many brands of pet food. Dogs and cats do not make the enzyme that digests flax, however, so it is useless to them. EPA and DHA are the fatty acids that are effective for dogs and cats and they are found only in algae and marine sources, such as fish oil and processed green lipped mussels. Products containing extra vitamin A, D or E can be toxic to pets, so read labels of fish oil products carefully. You only want the EPA & DHA, not other vitamins. Mercury-free products are safer, too.

Hill's Pet Nutrition has a new diet for dogs called Derm Diet. It's made to decrease itching caused by allergic dermatitis. If your dog doesn't have food allergies requiring a hypoallergenic diet then Derm Diet would be a good choice. It contains extra fatty acids (fish oil) and several plant extracts that have been proven to reduce inflammation and itching.

All Syrian hamsters are descended from a mother Syrian hamster and her 11 babies, dug up from their burrow in a farm field near Aleppo in 1930. Originally intended only to be lab animals, the hamsters proved so easy to tame that they soon were being sold as pets. There are more than a million pet hamsters in the U.S. today.





# OBESITY IN PETS CONTINUES TO RISE

Banfield is the largest veterinary corporation in the U.S., with over 800 practices nationwide. The company tracks disease statistics and publishes the findings, to help the profession. Banfield recently released its 2017 State of Pet Health Report and the numbers showed that pets' waistlines are continuing to grow.

The report analyzed the health records of the 2.5 million dogs and 500,000 cats that visited Banfield facilities across the United States in 2016. Those numbers showed that the number of overweight dogs and cats have been steadily growing over the past decade, to a point where one in three of the pets visiting Banfield last year were reported as overweight or obese.

The data shows a huge increase in the numbers related to weight. Over the past ten years, the number of overweight cats went up 169% and the number of overweight dogs increased 158%.

These numbers are concerning considering the conditions that can go along with an increase in weight, such as arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, respiratory diseases and cancer.

(Obese pets have a life expectancy at least two years shorter than pets that maintain a healthy weight.) The report found that in addition to the increase in overweight pets, cases of arthritis also increased by 82% over the last ten years.

One result of the increasing number of overweight pets is that pet owners now tend to underestimate their pet's body condition—overweight now looks normal to many so they don't seek advice or care from their veterinarians.

It also costs pet owners in terms of money. The report found that over a four-year period, owners of overweight dogs spent 17% more on healthcare costs and 25% more on medication than owners of healthy dogs. Owners of overweight cats spent 36% more on diagnostic procedures than owners of healthy cats.

The report can be downloaded from Banfield's website, which also provides an interactive map that shows where pets are at risk of certain conditions. For example, pets are more likely to be overweight in Idaho and Washington than Arkansas and Louisiana. And they are more likely to be at risk of dental disease in Kansas and Missouri than in New York and Massachusetts.

The report also touched on the most common diseases affecting pets in 2016. Dental disease, including tartar, gingivitis, and periodontal issues, topped the list. Nearly two million dogs and more than 350,000 cats seen at Banfield in 2016 were affected.



Otitis externa was a concern for dogs—one in seven were affected in 2016. Diabetes mellitus, intestinal parasites, and fleas and ticks were some of the other common conditions faced by both dogs and cats in 2016.

## Cat Declawing Performed Less & Less Frequently

Declawing is a controversial subject in veterinary medicine, with many veterinarians refusing to perform it at all. Our position here at Best Friends is to explain carefully why we prefer not to declaw but to perform the surgery here rather than have our clients go somewhere else. Here, we know our patients will get good pain management, and surgery will be done using a



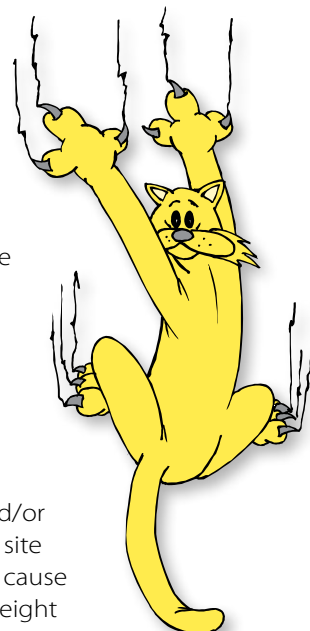
surgery laser and a high quality technique.

There are a lot of reasons not to declaw. In May of 2017, the *Journal of Feline Medicine & Surgery* published a report titled "Pain and Adverse Behavior in Declawed Cats." It confirms that many declawed cats have medical and behavioral problems as a consequence of the surgery.

For the study, the authors investigated a total of 137 non-declawed cats and 137 declawed cats, of which 33 were declawed on all four paws. All 274 cats were physically examined for signs of pain and excessive grooming or chewing of fur. Their owners were asked about unwanted behaviors. Inappropriate toileting (accidents outside the box), biting, aggression, and overgrooming occurred

significantly more often in the declawed cats than the non-declawed cats.

Declawed cats were also nearly three times more likely to be diagnosed with back pain. This may be due to shortening of the declawed toes, and altered gait and/or chronic pain at the site of the surgery may cause cats to shift their weight



to the hind legs and lumbar spine. The research showed the back pain was worse when fragments of bone were found under the skin from improper surgical technique. (63 percent of the declawed cats in this study had bone fragments present, demonstrating how often surgery is not done well. The last digit of the toe should be removed cleanly at the joint.)

Even optimal surgical technique does not eliminate the risks for adverse consequences. Removal of the nail and attached bone forces the cat to bear weight on the soft cartilage at the end of the remaining toe bones. Pain in the toes prompts cats to choose a soft surface, such as carpet, instead of cat litter, leading to litter box avoidance and accidents outside the box.

Nerves in each toe are severed during surgery. The cut ends of the nerves can form neuromas, little balls of inflamed tissue at the cut end of each nerve. Neuromas are painful, too. People with amputations often report what is referred to as phantom pain. Many cats experience this as well, leading to lameness, chewing of the toes and sometimes aggression. Chronic pain makes anyone cranky.

Many cat owners choose to declaw because their cats scratch furniture instead of the scratching post. When cats scratch, they're leaving their chemical signatures, which we can't detect but other cats can. A new tool to help pet



owners, which is expected to be released in the U.S. by the end of this year, is FeliScratch.

Like Feliway, FeliScratch is a synthetic version of a naturally occurring pheromone. When applied on the desired scratching

surface, it mimics natural visual and chemical signals that encourage the cat to scratch there again. A bit of catnip in the product attracts cats to it as well.

Feliscratch (unlike a declaw surgery) has no potential adverse effects, and has been clinically proven to help reduce or stop unwanted scratching in the home, on both vertical and horizontal surfaces, and it redirects cats to their scratching post(s). It is already available in Europe.

Choosing a scratching surface your cat likes and placing the scratching post or board on a main traffic route, where your cat travels often, are also important. You may have to try a few options to figure out what your cat likes best. To discourage furniture scratching, try double sided sticky tape. Sticky tape strips are available at many pet stores or on-line.

## More Tidbits...

Bartonellosis, more commonly known as cat-scratch fever, affects thousands of people every year. It is a bacterial infection that can be spread from cat to human or via cat fleas and ticks. Cats are commonly carriers while showing no symptoms themselves. Humans with Bartonellosis can be asymptomatic, or they may develop swollen, painful lymph nodes, neurologic disease, heart disease, deep tissue abscesses, bone infection, skin lesions or endometriosis. It can be a fatal disease for people with compromised immune systems.

Nearly 1/3 of reported cases reported occur in children less than fourteen years of age. Veterinary staff members are commonly infected, with 28% testing positive in a recent study. The best prevention is protecting your cat from parasites that can carry the disease.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has recently published a consensus document recommending that cats be spayed or neutered by 5 months of age. This policy was also endorsed by the American Association of Feline Practitioners, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, the American Animal Hospital Association and several other organizations. The reason for the recommendation is that female cats can become pregnant at a young age. Every pregnancy adds to the feline overpopulation problem. Five months is as old as we can go and still guarantee that pregnancy is not possible.

Brachycephalic dogs are 3.8 times more likely to develop a corneal ulcer than dogs without squished faces. Their risk for heat stroke is 146% higher, for ear and skin infections 40% higher and for pneumonia, skin cancer and fungal skin disease risk is about 100% higher for each.

It's trendy now to label pet foods as "non-GMO" even when none of the ingredients in the product are even available as a GMO. Other label claims that have no connection to the quality of the diet but make pet owners feel good about purchasing them include "no grain," "no gluten," "no soy" and "no byproducts."

Based on results of a large study published recently, the new recommendation for dogs with mitral valve disease is to start on the medication pimobendan as soon as heart enlargement is noted on x-rays. Dogs treated with pimobendan early in the course of their disease had 15 more months of symptom-free life than did dogs treated with placebo. Chest x-rays should be taken at least annually in dogs with a heart murmur.





You never know when your healthy pet will suddenly become unhealthy. Each year, one in three pets will have an unexpected illness or injury. Every 6 seconds, a pet owner in the U.S. pays a veterinary invoice of \$3000 or more.

Would you be able to afford \$8000 for spinal surgery or \$10,000 for radiation treatment if your pet needed it? Most of our clients would struggle to pay for something this costly. It's heartbreaking to have to decline needed care due to costs, especially if the prognosis is good and the pet would make a full recovery if the money was available.

Pet insurance is the smart thing to have so you don't have to make medical decisions based on cost alone. Most plans reimburse 90% of your medical costs for new conditions.

There are a lot of different companies out there, so once you've chosen to

purchase insurance you then need to choose a company and a plan. There are several things to consider. You can often choose whether wellness services will be covered or just catastrophic care, whether you want a yearly deductible or a deductible for each diagnosis, and how large that deductible is.

Many companies don't cover genetic disorders. If you have a purebred cat or dog, services you think will be covered may not be. Some plans won't cover a second ACL surgery, only the first one. Spend some time reading the fine print so you're not surprised by what your policy will or won't cover. Some have apps that let you take care of all of your insurance-related tasks on your phone and others do not. Reimbursement timing and methods can vary as well.

Companies we think you will do well with include FIGO, Healthy Paws, Nationwide, Petplan and Trupanion.

## CONSIDER PET INSURANCE FOR PEACE OF MIND No Matter What Illness Comes Your Way

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