

# BEST FRIENDS

## BULLETIN



⇒ A FRIENDLY NEWSLETTER FROM BEST FRIENDS VETERINARY CENTER ←

## ARTHRITIS & CHRONIC PAIN IN CATS

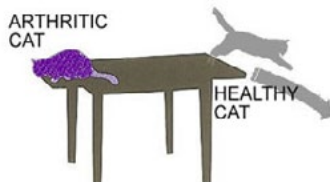
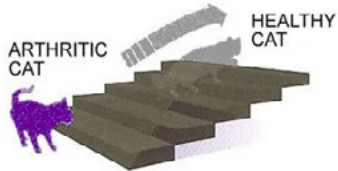
### HOW TO RECOGNISE SUBTLE CHANGES IN YOUR CAT



Arthritic cat using chair to help jump onto a table.



Arthritic cat will play less frequently and spend more time sleeping.



There are an estimated 80 million cats in the US. Almost half suffer from chronic and debilitating pain associated with the above conditions. Only a small percentage of these 40 million affected cats have been properly diagnosed and are under a vet's care.

The barrier to delivering needed care is often due to the difficulty in diagnosing chronic pain in a species that has successfully evolved because of its ability to mask such pain as a form of protection against predators.

90% OF CATS OVER AGE 12 HAVE ARTHRITIS ON X-RAYS.

*Continued on page 2...*

### Dear Clients & Friends,

Are you sick of COVID-19 protocols? I find it hard to believe we are almost two years into it and we're still not out the other side. We had two employees out with COVID in November and three more in December. Two of these team members became quite ill. It made me very glad we were still wearing masks at work.

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## ARTHRITIS & CHRONIC PAIN IN CATS

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Sadly, most cats with arthritis are under-medicated for pain. Most people attribute signs of pain to aging or are completely unaware their pet is less active and playful because something hurts. If we could teach just one thing to vastly improve the lives of our patients, it would be how to identify pain.

Arthritis in cats usually begins at around age nine. In its earliest stage, there are no symptoms, but as the disease slowly progresses and joint damage worsens, cats begin to “slow down.” Most cat owners don’t pick up on subtle pain signals.

PAIN DOESN'T LOOK LIKE YOU THINK IT DOES. MEOWING OR CRYING ARE THE LEAST COMMON SIGNS OF PAIN IN PETS. THE MOST COMMON SIGNS OF PAIN ARE SLEEPING MORE AND INTERACTING LESS.

This is where we can help.


Cat behavior here at the veterinary clinic is not like it is at home. Unlike a dog, we can't trot a cat up and down the hall on a leash to watch it move. We have to watch for hesitation when the cat jumps up or down, or slowness on the stairs. The best person to pick up on these things is you!

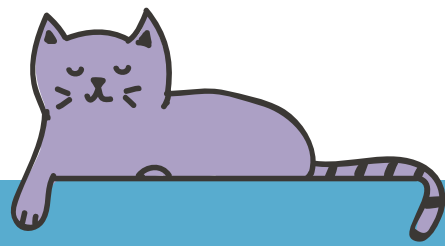
A new website, [www.painfreecats.org](http://www.painfreecats.org), has a tool that allows pet owners to diagnose pain in their feline companions. It is called the Feline Musculoskeletal Pain Index, FMPI. Developed by NC State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, the FMPI is the only tool for diagnosing and monitoring feline chronic pain arising from degenerative joint disorders.

Basically, the tool is a questionnaire about pain-related behaviors. It walks you through a set of questions about your cat's mobility, agility, and disposition. Each answer is scored. The sum of the scored observations measures the degree to which the cat suffers from pain associated with long-term, degenerative osteoarthritis (OA) or related neuromuscular and orthopedic conditions.

*The Feline Musculoskeletal Pain Index, FMPI is tool that allows pet owners to diagnose pain in their feline companions. Visit [painfreecats.org](http://painfreecats.org).*

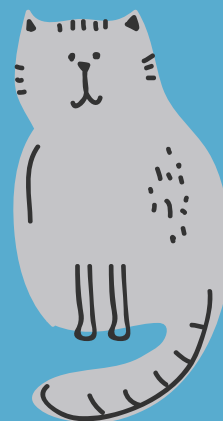
Cats most frequently have arthritis in the lower back and the elbows. Jumping up and down less or slowness going up or down stairs may be noticed. Lack of grooming may mean back pain is making it hurt to twist or bend.

Only 43% of pet owners polled believed their pet's quality of life could be improved. Yet most arthritic pets are under-medicated for pain and millions go without dental care and regular veterinary check-ups. Ask us how we can help your pet live a longer, healthier life! 



### SYMPTOMS OF PAIN IN CATS (AT ANY AGE):

- SLOWNESS, STIFFNESS, DIFFICULTY RISING OR JUMPING UP.
- YOUR CAT USED TO RACE UP OR DOWN THE STAIRS BUT NOW SHE GOES SLOWLY.
- HE STOPPED CLIMBING UP TO A FAVORITE HIGH PERCH OR COUNTER.
- SLEEPING MORE, LESS RESPONSIVE TO ACTIVITIES GOING ON (IT'S NOT JUST "OLD AGE!").
- PLAYING LESS OFTEN OR FOR SHORTER AMOUNTS OF TIME
- UNKEMPT FUR FROM NOT BEING ABLE TO TWIST AND BEND TO GROOM
- MISSING THE LITTER BOX DUE TO DIFFICULTY SQUATTING OR GETTING IN OR OUT.
- DECREASED APPETITE OR WEIGHT LOSS.
- EATING SLOWLY OR SHOWING A NEW PREFERENCE FOR CANNED FOOD MAY INDICATE ORAL PAIN.



## ASSISI LOOP THERAPY

The Assisi Loop is a device we use to deliver pulsed electromagnetic wave therapy to areas of the body where there is pain or inflammation. The device sets up a microcurrent, a trickle of electromagnetic energy that stimulates cells to help speed healing. It has no side effects because it's not a pharmaceutical, and it's non-invasive.

For short term use, we rent them out. For chronic conditions, such as arthritis, it makes more sense to purchase a unit. For pets who don't like to hold still or who have multiple joints or areas we need to treat, they also make a mat that can go under the pet's bed.

They are super-simple to use – you just push the button and the field turns on for fifteen minutes before shutting itself back off. There are jackets with Velcro loops that can be used to hold the loop where you want it, so your pet can move around without needing it repositioned.

### ASSISI LOOP THERAPY:

ORTHOPEDIC INJURIES  
DEGENERATIVE DISORDERS  
NEUROLOGICAL PROBLEMS  
POST-SURGICAL PAIN AND SWELLING  
INFLAMMATORY CONDITIONS  
WOUND CARE



For more information, visit [www.assisianimalhealth.com](http://www.assisianimalhealth.com)

Letter to Clients & Friends | ... continued from page 1


It's hard on everyone when we have people out sick for two weeks. Just like most workplaces, we've been struggling to find and keep good employees. We are often a bit short-handed even without people being out sick.



Despite concern for the spread of COVID, we are gradually returning to more normal appointment management. We are still escorting clients right from the front door into exam rooms, but we are back to mostly doing checkouts at the front desk. To avoid pile-ups there, we are usually delivering medications and pet food to your car. We are still trying to limit the number of people in our small exam rooms, especially children, and we require masks. Many clients are still choosing to wait in their cars when their pets need simple services, which minimizes risk to everyone. When COVID cases in Wisconsin drop again we will be making further changes. We'll keep you posted!

The only real drawback of Assisi Loops is how frequently you have to use them at first. Ideally, you would initially treat your pet 3-4 times a day, before backing down to 1-2

times daily long term. If you work, which most of us do, it's hard to find the time to use it that often. If you are treating multiple joints at 10 minutes each, this can quickly add up to several hours a day. Sometimes it makes more sense to come in twice a week for therapy laser treatments instead, which provide similar benefits.

Assisi Loops can be used along with the therapy laser and any medication your pet may already be taking for pain or inflammation. 



Business has slowed a little, back to a more normal level of busy. Our schedule is still almost always full but we aren't double and triple booked like we were. I'm back to leaving work at 8 pm instead of 8:30 or 9. We are still booking 6-8 weeks out for surgery and dentistry, however. If you want to use the dental coupons in this newsletter, call early to schedule your pet's appointment!

You may notice some new faces up front and in exam rooms. Danielle's maternity leave starts late January and Allie's in March, so other team members will be filling in for them. We have a new technician starting this month, along with a new assistant. We have three new receptionists, Megan (now we have three Megans), Mary Beth and Mandy. I hope 2022 is a more normal, less stressful year for all of us, with happy, healthy pets, and a couple of new babies to boot! Happy New Year!

Nan Boss, DVM



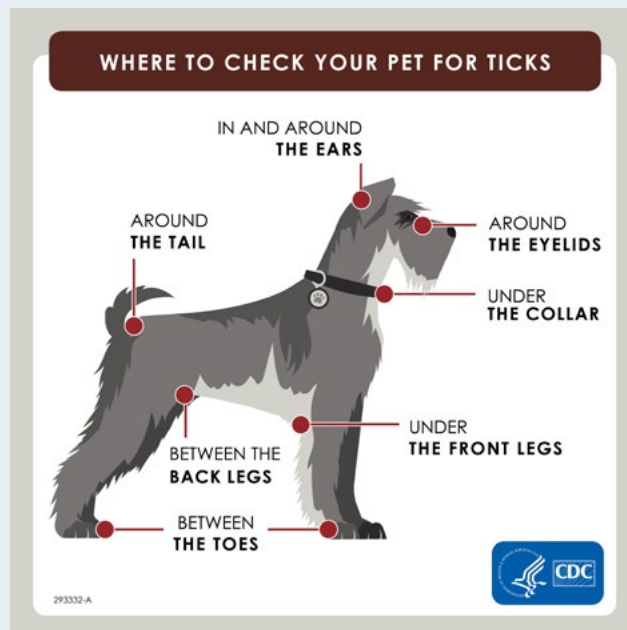
# TICK-BORNE DISEASES IN WISCONSIN



We see several diseases in Wisconsin carried by ticks. All dog owners should be acquainted with them because most dogs are at risk. So far, only Lyme disease can be prevented by a vaccine. We test for four tick-borne diseases every year, along with your pet's annual heartworm test, to enable us to treat these illnesses at an early stage.

## WHAT IS LYME DISEASE?

You've probably heard of it, but what causes it? Lyme disease is an infection caused by a type of bacteria called a spirochete, for its spiral shape. Although originally discovered in Lyme, Connecticut, Lyme disease has now been reported in most states. The disease is more properly called Borreliosis, after the bacterial species that causes it - *Borrelia burgdorferi*.



Lyme disease is a serious and life threatening infection. It can cause an array of symptoms, including kidney, heart, skin and neurological disease, abortion, and infertility. The most common signs in dogs used to be low grade fever (103-104° F), weight loss, and lameness or joint pain, which may shift from leg to leg. Nowadays, we see more subtle cases, where joint and kidney damage occur slowly

and lameness may not occur at all. Symptoms in cats are similar, although cats are less susceptible than dogs.

Symptoms may occur as soon as four days after exposure to an infected tick, or as long as one year later. The average incubation period is one month.

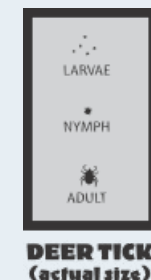
## HOW IS LYME DISEASE SPREAD?

The deer tick is the most common carrier of Lyme disease in Wisconsin, Minnesota and the eastern coastal states. Deer are not the only animals that harbor deer ticks, so pets can pick up Lyme disease whether or not they are in deer-populated areas. The larval deer ticks prefer to feed on small rodents that live in grassy or brushy areas, often around the fringes of woods or fields.

The deer tick lives a rather complex life cycle. It develops from an egg to a larvae, larva to a nymph, and finally from nymph to an adult. Deer ticks are among the first ticks to become active in the spring, and they remain active in various stages almost all year 'round. All three life cycle stages of ticks can transmit Lyme disease, and all three are very small and difficult to find.

Ticks wait atop grasses and other vegetation until an animal brushes against them. Then they cling to skin, fur or clothing and will crawl for a time on their host before they embed and feed.

Ticks must be embedded and engorged (not flat) before they transmit the Lyme disease bacteria, but some of the other tick-borne illnesses can be transmitted much more quickly. It is important to look for and remove any ticks as soon as possible in order to prevent infection. Even the most effective tick prevention products take several hours to kill ticks.



## CAN LYME DISEASE BE TREATED?

Yes. The bacterium that causes the disease is sensitive to several antibiotics. Doxycycline is the one most commonly used to treat the disease in animals, but the *Borrelia burgdorferi* bacteria are starting



to develop resistance to it. Here at Best Friends, we have switched to a newer antibiotic to treat Lyme disease.



The length of time needed to treat the disease varies, but four weeks is usually the minimum amount. Prolonged treatment may be necessary; relapses and reinfection are common. The earlier the diagnosis is made, the more successful treatment is likely to be. Even with prompt treatment there can be permanent damage, especially if the infection involved the brain, kidneys or heart.

Preventing the disease altogether is a much better alternative than waiting for your pet to pick up the disease.

## SHOULD I VACCINATE?

In a word, yes! We recommend vaccination for Lyme disease, especially if you take your dog hunting, hiking, camping or running in fields or woods. We also recommend it if you can see deer from your house or yard. Remember, the larval deer ticks are parasites of smaller prey on the outskirts of the areas that deer inhabit.



If you live in a town, city or suburb with no woods or fields nearby, and you don't travel with your dog, vaccination is probably not necessary. That said, today's vaccines are very safe, as well as effective. We would rather you err on the side of vaccinating, rather than risk your dog becoming infected.

We also advise the use of tick control products on your pet if he or she has tick exposure. Even if you vaccinate your dog, ticks carry other diseases besides Lyme disease, and their bites can become irritated or infected as well. Prompt removal of any ticks you do find on your dog is recommended to help prevent exposure to disease.

## WHAT OTHER DISEASES ARE CARRIED BY TICKS?

Most pet owners have heard about Lyme disease but are not familiar with the other diseases ticks can carry. In addition to Lyme disease, ticks in Wisconsin carry Anaplasmosis and two strains of Ehrlichiosis. Another tick-borne disease, which we do not have an in-house test for, is Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Despite the name, RMSF occurs most often in the southeastern U.S. With global warming, RMSF cases will likely become more common here in the future.

Below is a short update on the other tick-borne infections we see most often here in Wisconsin.

## Anaplasmosis:

This disease, caused by *Anaplasma* bacteria, is spread by several species of ticks. While it is common in Wisconsin, it is the least likely of the tick-borne diseases to cause 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, blood won't clot properly and severe bleeding could result.) If the CBC is normal, we don't usually need to treat for it.

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-ohsis) 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. Ehrlichiosis is the most deadly of the tick-borne diseases found here. 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 Southeastern U.S. but that's often not the case anymore.

*continued on page 7...*

WONDERING WHAT TICK YOU JUST PULLED OFF YOUR DOG?

TICKENCOUNTER.ORG

HAS EXCELLENT PICTURES AND LISTS THE DISEASES CARRIED BY EACH TICK, THE TIME IT TAKES TO CARRY THE DISEASE CARRIED BY EACH BITE AND OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION.

# FEBRUARY IS PET DENTAL MONTH

## HEALTHY MOUTH™

If your pet won't let you brush its teeth and can't be on a tartar-control diet, what other options are there for home health care? One of the best solutions is a product called Healthymouth™. It is a liquid product added to a pet's water or applied to the teeth as a gel. It reduces plaque formation by 85% or so and is clinically proven. Healthymouth formula safely cleans teeth and gums, reducing plaque before it can garden into tartar. The effect continues to improve the longer

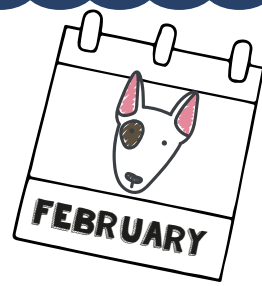


the product is used. Existing plaque is significantly softened, making the use of tooth brushing, dental diets and dental chew-bones more effective.

## EPULIDES

The most common type of tumor in the mouths of dogs is called an epulis. The plural of this latin-based name is epulides (Eh-pew-lid-ees). Epulides most commonly arise in response to the accumulation of plaque and tartar on the teeth. Gum inflammation can lead to gum recession or it can lead to lumps instead. These lumps usually hang over or cover up the teeth, which then leads to even more plaque and tartar build-up underneath. Epulides should be removed at the time of dental cleaning, and seeing them usually indicates periodontal disease.

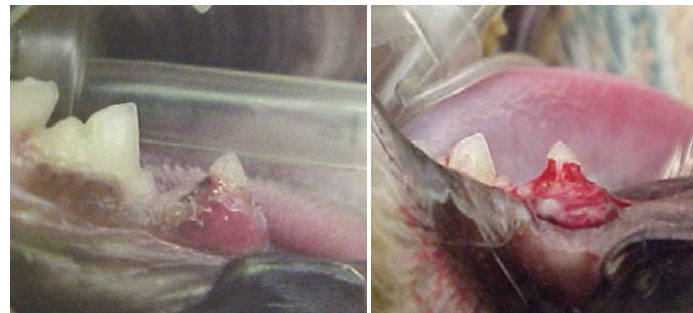
We can see epulides in any dog but some dog breeds have much higher tendency to form them, or to have hyperplastic (excessive) gum growth. Boxers, bulldogs and mastiffs



are particularly prone. These dogs may need extensive gum surgery on a regular basis to keep this under control. Without removal, the overgrown gums tissue may bleed, cause pain from chewing and eventually lead to tooth loss.

In dogs, there are several types of epulides. The most common type, a fibromatous epulis, appears on a stalk of tissue, much like a mushroom, or as an unmoving lump. It is usually pink in color and has a smooth surface. It may appear as an enlargement on the gum tissue near an incisor, canine, or premolar tooth. These are the least concerning type, as they don't invade into the bone. Other types of epulides arise from the bone underneath the gum and can invade or destroy the jawbone. More extensive surgery is needed for these types that involve bony tissue.

In cats, epulides often arise where there are cavities, called resorptive lesions, in the teeth. If part of a tooth is obscured by a gum lump in a cat, there may be plaque underneath but more likely there is a hole in the tooth.



Resorptive lesions are painful and destroy the tooth as the crown. Eventually the roots are eaten away. These lesions should be addressed promptly to avoid unnecessary pain. The picture on the left shows the gum covering a resorptive lesion. The picture on the right shows the hole in crown of the tooth underneath the epulis. Ouch! 🐾



## Tick-borne Diseases in Wisconsin | ...continued from page 5

Many, many dogs in Wisconsin test positive for Lyme disease or Anaplasmosis without developing symptoms or needing treatment. However, Ehrlichiosis is much more likely to cause serious illness and death.

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, we always screen for kidney damage, anemia, low platelet count and other possible abnormalities, and we treat it with the antibiotic doxycycline. There is often a long lag period between acquiring

DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO PREVENT TICK-BORNE DISEASES: VACCINATE, USE HIGH QUALITY PREVENTIVE PRODUCTS, AND HAVE YOUR DOG TESTED ANNUALLY TO CATCH INFECTION EARLY. 🐾

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, even with aggressive treatment. The immune system may be able to combat one disease, but if another is added serious illness is much more likely.



## SUMMARY

The important thing is to be aware your dog probably will be exposed to ticks carrying these bacteria sooner or later, even if you never see a tick. In fact, most owners whose dogs test positive have never seen a tick on their dog. Fortunately, most of the dogs with positive blood tests never develop any symptoms of illness, especially if we can catch the disease early with our screening tests. It's scary to think your dog might have a dreadful disease but in most cases the outcome is good.

We don't recommend over-the-counter tick control products in most cases, as many of these are neither as effective nor as safe as prescription products. 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. The longer a tick is attached, the higher the chance that an infectious disease will make it into the pet.

No tick preventives, even high-quality prescription products, are 100% effective, which is why we vaccinate for Lyme disease as well as using preventive products.

*We recommend doing everything you can to prevent tick-borne diseases – vaccinate, use high quality preventive products, and have your dog tested annually so we can catch infection early.*

The frequent positive blood tests we see when we do our annual blood testing for heartworm, Lyme disease, Anaplasmosis and Ehrlichiosis are red flags that tell us we need to be very careful to protect our pets (and ourselves) from ticks.

We have effective vaccines to protect dogs from Lyme disease but we have none for Ehrlichiosis, Anaplasmosis or Rocky Mountain spotted fever. To prevent these infections, use high quality tick prevention products all year 'round. 🐾



 **\$25 OFF**   
DENTAL CLEANING  
at Best Friends Veterinary Clinic during February. Call soon! We fill up fast!

 **\$25 OFF**   
DENTAL X-RAYS  
at Best Friends Veterinary Clinic during February at the time of your cleaning.

# TID-BITS



**Fewer returns than expected suggest most pandemic pups found forever homes.** Animal rescue organizations and shelters have not experienced an anticipated wave of animal surrenders as people returned to work and school, suggesting that adopting pets during the pandemic was not something that was just a temporary thing, like an impulse buy. However, some organizations have experienced a higher than average return rate, and advocates continue to worry about the effects of a predicted rise in economic evictions, leaving both humans and their pets homeless.

Breed, sex, age and living environment all appear to be factors in dogs' propensity to exhibit behaviors akin to attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in humans. Dogs with ADHD-like behaviors are also the most likely to display obsessive-compulsive behaviors, according to a study in Translational Psychiatry. Working breeds, male dogs, young dogs and dogs left alone all day every day are the most likely to

exhibit an inability to calm down, inattention, and continuous barking or whining, and the findings suggest the same brain regions and neurobiological pathways are at play in human and canine ADHD and OCD.

"Zooming around at breakneck speed is one way dogs express joy," says veterinarian Zac Pilossoph. "The zoomies" are neither bad behavior nor signs of health problems and shouldn't be discouraged unless the dog is in an unsafe place. Breakable objects should be removed from areas where dogs like to zoom.

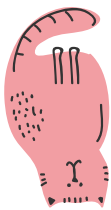


## The AVMA is supporting the proposed Paws Off Act,

a bipartisan House bill that would require xylitol-containing products to be labeled with a warning that the sweetener is toxic to dogs. Xylitol is used in a broad array of sugar-free foods and dental products, and xylitol poisoning calls to the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center rose from slightly more than 200 in 2005 to 6,760 in 2018.



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