

## STAFF NEWS

This month we have welcomed Helen Burton into our reception team and Hannah Williams as a kennel assistant at our Honiton branch, we have also recently welcomed Lucy into our Nursing team in Cullompton as a trainee nurse.

### Autumn is here and winter isn't far away!

Sadly growing older isn't optional for our pets but a lot of suffering that goes with it can be, particularly during the colder months.

It's really important to make sure they have a soft and warm bed, in particular using foam for larger dogs, this will help reduce pressure sores. Place beds near radiators or heaters and using blankets will help keep them and their joints warm.

Keeping the weight off your pets as they get older will ease the pressure on their joints so make sure you don't over feed them.

There are many things we can do to ease the pain and discomfort caused by arthritis and joint disease. Speak to your vet if you think your pet is starting to struggle.



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### How to Spot Arthritis in Dogs and Cats

Arthritis is one of the most common ailments seen in middle-aged to older pets. Even younger dogs and cats, under some circumstances, can suffer from arthritic changes.

#### Common signs:

##### Limping/difficulty moving -

You may see your pet limping or favouring one or more of their legs. In some cases, the limp may seem worse when your pet first rises and become less noticeable as your pet "warms up" by moving around.

Your pet may also become reluctant to do things that were previously easy for them to do. For instance, your dog may find it difficult to get in and out of the car or may have difficulty going up and down stairs.

Arthritic cats, on the other hand simply become less active. Often this change in behaviour corresponds to the cat becoming older and a cat owner may simply assume that the change is normal when, in fact, your cat may actually be decreasing his activity level because he is in pain due to arthritis. They may also stop grooming, this could be because they are unable to position themselves comfortably.



**Spinal Issues**-Arthritic changes can occur not only in the legs but also in the various parts of the spine. These changes may result in a sore neck, abnormal posture with a "hunch" in the back, or lameness of one or both hind legs

**Tiredness and Irritability**—Arthritic animals may become irritable. They may snap and/or bite when approached or handled, particularly if the petting or handling takes place in a manner that increases their pain.

**Muscle Atrophy**- Arthritic pets often develop muscle atrophy or dying off of the muscle tissue due to inactivity and decreased use of the muscles. A pet with atrophied muscles in their legs will have a leg which looks thinner than a normal leg.

**Licking, Chewing & Biting**—Pets affected with arthritis may also begin to lick at, chew or bite at body areas that are painful. This may even reach the point of causing inflamed skin and hair loss over affected areas.

Through out November we are now offering 'Creaky clinics' here at the Vale, if you would like your dog or cat to have a check over by one of our nurses please make an appointment. We ask if possible that you bring along a fresh urine sample. Sample pots can be collected from reception upon request.

## Keeping your small furries warm this Autumn and winter

If your rabbit or guinea pig lives outside then it's important to prepare their accommodation for winter. Rabbits and guinea pigs cope well in moderately cold temperatures as long as they have a warm dry area to shelter. Wild rabbits' warrens are insulated as they are underground which prevents them dropping below freezing. As a hutch is above ground you need to take steps to ensure it provides enough protection to your pet to keep their bed area above the freezing outside temperatures



### A bit of DIY!

A hutch can only provide protection if it's in good repair, so, if you haven't already, now is the time to make any repairs to your pets home and make sure it's water tight. Start by checking the inside of your hutch for signs of water stains or damp that may indicate water is getting in. Rising damp is also an issue for our small furries hutches. Hutches should be raised off the ground to prevent the base becoming damp and rotting. If your hutch doesn't have legs fitted then placing a few bricks at each corner will raise it enough to allow air to circulate and reduce damp.



Keeping your hutch covered with a warm woollen blanket and tarpaulin over night will help keep any rain or draughts away or you can buy insulated hutch covers, but make sure you take them off during the day so not to over heat them!



## Water

Check a few times a day that their water bottle or dish of water hasn't frozen over. You can buy bottle covers that help to prevent this, or a thick sock over the bottle can also help, but still check the water and the spout have not frozen.



### Exercise

Rabbits and guinea pigs still need exercise in winter so bring them indoors for a run around, or let them have a short time in the garden but make sure they don't get wet. If they get very wet, dry them with a towel and let them warm up naturally indoors before putting them back in their hutch.



### A little bit of information about micro chipping:

A microchip is inserted under the skin just like your pets vaccinations, although the needle used is slightly larger.

Every dog owner in England now must have a microchip as of April 2016 under Government plans intended to cut a rise in strays.

If your dog is found without a microchip a £500 fine can be issued.

We have recently seen a large increase in the number of stray cats being brought into our surgery as strays.

Although microchipping cats is not mandatory we highly recommend that all cats are chipped so they can be reunited with their owners as soon as possible. Stray cats that are not claimed have to be re-homed putting added pressure on local rescue centres who often do not have the room.

