



Your Vet



EAST PORT VETERINARY HOSPITAL

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National Award
Winner 2007

Other Staff Members:

Stacey Theofanou, Rebecca Spring, Kate Bisco, Emma Crocket, Amie Burgess, Summer Earles, Annie Thomson, Wilhelmina Ridding, Nikki Moulston, Debbie Dawson

Consultation Hours:

Consultation by appointment.

Monday to Friday: 8.00am-6.00pm

Saturday: 8.30am - 12.00 noon.

Deluxe Grooming!

East Port Veterinary Hospital now offers a full grooming service on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with Nikki Moulston. This service includes hydrobathing, clipping and nail trims – the ultimate day spa! To book your pet in, call us on (02) 6583 5677.



Spay your rabbit

Most responsible cat and dog owners understand the benefits of sterilising their pets but we often forget about our smaller 'furrries'. Female rabbits (*does*) have a particularly high rate of cancer of the *uterus* (womb). Studies have shown that 60-80% of does 5 years or older have uterine cancer. This will eventually lead to a premature death but is preventable by *spaying* (sterilising by removing the uterus) at a young age.



Spaying a doe not only protects her from uterine cancer but also can provide other benefits. When a doe reaches puberty, she can become quite 'stropy' and aggressive towards other rabbits and her owners. Sterilisation will decrease this aggressive behaviour. Some does suffer from recurrent false pregnancies and will constantly pull out fur to line nests for non-existent offspring. The hormonal changes of false pregnancy also result in mammary gland development and sometimes milk production. These behaviours will all cease after sterilisation. Spaying prevents unwanted pregnancies, allowing multiple rabbits to be kept together in a more natural social group.

The surgery for spaying a doe can be slightly more involved than in the cat or dog because the rabbit's uterine area is a major site for fat storage. Large amounts of fat make it more difficult to identify and tie off the blood vessels associated with the ovaries and uterus. Your rabbit does not need to be starved before the general anaesthetic, as rabbits cannot vomit. After anaesthetic, rabbits should be offered food as soon as they are alert and awake enough to eat. The cost of sterilisation may seem excessive for a "pocket pet". However, we should remember that a rabbit's average life span is 6-8 years (and there are records of rabbits even living to 15 years) so sterilisation and all the health benefits it entails can be considered a sound investment for your little pet.

It should be noted that some states in Australia have strict guidelines as to the keeping of rabbits as pets.

Spring is in the air

The arrival of spring brings a joyful array of blooms and blossoms. Unfortunately, accompanying this floral bonanza is an increase in airborne pollens. While these can cause us to suffer hayfever, they also contribute to itchy, allergic skin disease in our canine and feline counterparts. This allergic skin disease is called *atopy*.

In dogs it causes itchiness and redness in the armpits, groin, feet, ears and anus area. Affected areas are often subjected to some serious licking and nibbling action and can develop secondary infections and chronic skin changes. Cats show their itchiness by over-grooming behaviour, often resulting in strips of symmetrical hair loss down their flanks, tummy and the back of their hind legs. The symptoms of atopy often worsen each year and, in severe cases, may become a problem all year round.



Treatment of atopy is always multifactorial. Your vet may prescribe medicated and soothing shampoos, antibiotics if secondary infection is present, antihistamines and/or steroids to help stop the itchiness, disease modifying drugs, fish oil supplements, specific low-allergen diets and even a trip to a specialised dermatologist.

Among other tests, dermatologists can perform *intra-dermal* skin testing. Intra-dermal skin testing involves injecting tiny amounts of geographically specific allergens under the skin and then assessing the skin's reaction to these foreign substances. This helps to identify the exact cause of the pet's allergy. With this information, a specific vaccination can be created which, given regularly under the skin, will help desensitise the body to the offending substance.

If your pet does show symptoms of allergic skin disease, it is wise to check with your vet before the skin changes become chronic and more difficult to reverse.

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inside



Treat my pet!

Steroids...friend or foe?

Corticosteroids (steroids) are some of the most maligned medications in the veterinarian's arsenal against disease. Why have steroids developed such a bad name, to the point where some vets have perhaps swung too far away from using a drug that can genuinely be a lifesaver for pets?

Steroids affect our bodies in many ways, resulting in both good and bad things that we associate with their use. Effects that steroids can have on the body include:

- Raising blood glucose. (Bad)
- Altering protein and fat metabolism. (Bad)
- Lowering the seizure-threshold of the brain. (Bad)
- Causing ulcers in the gastrointestinal tract. (Bad)
- Increasing urination and thirst. (Annoying)
- Improving mood, appetite and behaviour. (Good)
- Reducing inflammation. (Good)
- Suppressing immunity at high doses. (Good or bad depending on circumstance)

Steroids have also been implicated in the development of *pancreatitis*. This is a nasty inflammatory condition of the *pancreas* (an internal organ), which is becoming increasingly common in dogs and occasionally cats. Overuse of steroids can also suppress the adrenal gland - causing a drop in production of the body's own steroids!

Whether the effect is positive or negative depends on the dose and formulation of the drug used. In veterinary medicine we can manipulate the dose of steroids to influence the effects we WANT. A good example of this is immune system suppression. While suppressing the immune system is bad for many pets, for those with overactive immune systems it is the opposite. In these cases a potentially damaging side effect actually becomes a life saving benefit!

Generally, when vets prescribe steroids, we aim to use the lowest possible dose that will still produce a positive clinical effect. We also aim to decrease the dose over time where possible. Ideally we will drop to every second or third day dosing

to give the pet's body 'days off' steroids. Increasingly, vets are avoiding using long-acting steroid injections except where there is no other choice (for example, if elderly owners are getting badly scratched trying to 'pill' their cat). By using tablets instead, we hope to keep the amount of drug in the system as low as possible.



When should we use steroids?

Steroids are used regularly in the treatment of anaphylaxis and allergic reactions. They are used extensively in high doses for the treatment of immune mediated diseases. In chronic skin allergies, pets may be on steroids long term at low doses. They can be used for inflammatory brain diseases if there is no infectious component, as well as chronic spinal disease. Steroids may also be used in the treatment of specific cancers, and in transplant surgery (for example cats receiving kidney transplants).

When should we not use steroids?

Generally speaking, if a pet has an infection we avoid steroid use. We also avoid them in pets with *diabetes mellitus*, *pancreatitis*, gut ulcers (unless caused by *inflammatory bowel disease*) and in ANY patient receiving '*non-steroidal anti-inflammatory*' drugs. We avoid using steroid ointments in pets with ulcers or trauma to the surface of the eye. Increasingly, we now avoid steroids in the treatment of acute head or spinal trauma, blood-loss and trauma associated shock. While many practitioners believe there is still a place for them in these cases, human studies are showing that outcomes are not better (and may be worse) with the use of steroids.

So are steroids friend or foe? Potentially both. If used correctly, they can improve the quality of life for our furry friends and in fact save many lives.

Use it or lose it!

As dogs age, their brains undergo changes which result in a decreased ability to think and remember. This *cognitive dysfunction* can result in many behavioural problems. Senile dogs may forget learned behaviours such as toilet training. They may wake their owners up in the middle of the night for breakfast, or they may disappear behind the sofa only to find they are unable to negotiate their way out. Often they forget faces, sometimes even failing to recognise their owner.

These changes are usually put down to 'just old age'. However, we can slow the progress of this cognitive decline. It has been shown in both people and dogs, that mental stimulation and exercise can help the brain to maintain normal function for longer. Whilst we don't advocate Sudoku and crosswords for our pets, there are many simple activities that may keep your canine's brain in tip-top shape.

A simple walk on a leash provides new sniffs and smells, sights and sounds to experience. Walking also helps to maintain muscle bulk without straining aged joints. The days of agility training with jumps and weaves have probably long gone but your old dog will benefit from basic obedience training such as 'sit', 'stay', 'wait' and 'drop' commands. Chew toys with different textures and also with hidden compartments for food can help stimulate and reward an ageing brain. Hands on petting, stroking and massage can also provide much needed sensory input and incidentally, is enjoyable for both pets *and* owners.



There are diets and medications on the market (designed specifically for ageing brains) that may also help to slow your pet's cognitive decline. However, even when these products are used, the brain still requires ongoing mental stimulation - if you don't use it you will lose it!



Emergency!

Snail Pellet Toxicity

Many Australians are avid gardeners and hate snails. Most gardeners have used snail pellets at some stage to combat these slippery little enemies. Snail and slug pellets vary but the ones vets love to hate contain *methiocarb* or *metaldehyde* (often coloured blue or green). These pellets are toxic if ingested in almost any quantity. Dogs are most commonly involved but occasionally cats can be affected. Baits advertised as having a 'bitting' agent in them rarely deter dogs that eat quickly, as they don't register the flavour until it is too late. The pellets are often cereal-based to attract snails, which unfortunately also attracts dogs.

Dogs may collect freshly laid pellets from the garden or retrieve the box from a shelf in a garden shed. Some dogs never survive to be presented to a veterinarian, especially if their owners are not home to notice their clinical signs, and we believe that many patients die at home. Depending on the amount of bait ingested and the size of the patient, the clinical signs range from trembling and muscle twitches with drooling; to full loss of consciousness, major seizures and overheating – leading to major organ damage, internal bleeding and brain death. Ultimately, if left untreated, the pet will die of either respiratory failure, overheating or organ failure.

With early or mild exposure to bait pellets, vets will usually attempt to induce vomiting (*emesis*) to empty the stomach. An oral charcoal-based substance may then be given. If a large volume of bait has been consumed, a pet is unable to walk or swallow, or emesis is unsuccessful, we may perform a gastric lavage (stomach pumping) under anaesthetic. We will often administer a charcoal solution via the stomach tube after lavage to bind any toxin that has already moved into the small intestine. An enema may be used to empty the large bowel of toxin. These pets may be hospitalised and given IV fluids to dilute the urine and support the kidneys.

Complications of severe snail bait intoxication include complications of the gastric lavage such as anaesthetic problems, trauma to the *oesophagus* (gullet) and aspiration of stomach contents into the lungs. There may be neurological changes after recovery (blindness/behavioural issues) although these are usually temporary. Rarely, liver damage can occur despite treatment. One rare but very serious sequel of metaldehyde toxicity is a condition of the small intestine called *intussusception*. This occurs because the

poison increases the motility of gut and one piece can 'telescope' into the next, causing an obstruction that requires surgical repair. This may not become clinically apparent until days after the initial treatment.

The prognosis for pets that have had the toxin eliminated from their body (via emesis or lavage) and recovered from the initial clinical signs is usually very good. Treatment of minor intoxication may cost in the region of \$300 – \$400. However, badly affected pets can cost in the region of \$1,500 – \$2,000.

Pets that have ingested snail baits should be protected from future access to bait, as the taste can be addictive! When it comes to snail pellets, the best prevention is to not use them. An alternative type of bait containing iron EDTA can be used but this can cause severe, even fatal, gastrointestinal symptoms if ingested by pets. If your council allows, chickens and ducks are great natural snail killers - and also a natural recycling tool!

Bird breathing

Birds have a unique way of breathing. Like cats and dogs, they do have lungs. However, their lungs are small and undergo little change in volume as they inhale and exhale. This is because they are connected to a series of compartments called *air sacs* that act as a bellows system, pulling air through the lungs continuously. Because there is a continual one-way stream of air through a bird's lungs, they are extremely efficient at capturing oxygen. This is important as birds that fly, particularly at high altitude, have enormous oxygen requirements.



The air sacs extend from the body cavity into the wings, legs and vertebral bones. Consequently, if a bird badly breaks its wing, infection can enter the air sacs and lungs. It also means that holding a bird tightly around the chest or stomach can "strangle" it. If you do need to restrain a bird, either loosely wrap it in a light cloth or restrain around the neck and tail area only, avoiding compression of the abdomen!

'Wot a lotta' Axolotl

The *axolotl* or 'Mexican walking fish' is a rather grotesque looking amphibian, which makes a fascinating pet. Most amphibians, such as frogs, have a lifecycle that involves the development of eggs into a larval stage (the tadpole) then onto an adult form (the frog), which can survive on land and in the water. The axolotl is unusual in that it is a type of *salamander*, which never reaches its adult form and consequently spends all its life in water. Despite being a larval form, the axolotl still reaches adulthood and is able to reproduce.



Axolotls range in size from 18-35 cm and come in a variety of colours including white, grey, black, brown and a golden colour. They have exuberant, external, fluffy gills through which they breathe. They do have very basic lungs and can occasionally be seen rising to the water surface and taking a gulp of air. Their amazing ability to regenerate limbs or tails, which have been bitten off by a fellow axolotl, means they have been the subjects of much laboratory investigation.

Axolotls have many specific housing and feeding requirements. The water temperature should ideally be between 14° and 20° C with minimal variation. Temperatures greater than 24° C cause stress and predispose to disease, whilst temperatures below 14° C slow metabolism and reduce their appetite. The base of the tank should be either fine sand or pebbles larger than 2 cm, as axolotls are notorious for eating normal aquarium gravel, which can cause gut obstructions. Water filtration systems need to be appropriate for the size of the tank as both over and under-filtration can cause problems. Axolotls can be fed a combination of live and pelleted foods but prefer food that sinks rather than floats on the surface of the water.

As with any pet ownership it pays to investigate the specific needs of your new pet. Many problems are related to poor husbandry, so seek help in setting up your axolotl's tank and hopefully it will live a long and happy life.



Signs of disease

The Red Eye

When presented with a patient that has one or two 'red' eyes, a veterinarian will consider many different possibilities. Diagnosing the cause of a red eye/s may not be simple, depending on the experience of the vet, the facilities and equipment they have at hand, and the patient's willingness to cooperate! When faced with a red eye, a vet may ask following questions - 'Where is the redness?' 'Are there any other signs in the eye?' and 'Are there other signs of disease in the body?'



Firstly the *conjunctiva* (the pink) and the *sclera* (the white) of the eye are evaluated. If the redness is limited to these regions and does not involve the globe of the eye itself, we will usually be able to make a diagnosis of *conjunctivitis*. Causes of conjunctivitis include allergy, trauma, infections (especially in cats) and decreased tear-production. Conjunctivitis is often self-limiting and generally easily treated.

Next we look at the other parts of the eye. We examine the front of the eye, including the *iris* (the coloured part of the eye), looking for abnormalities. If a 'red' eye shows evidence of swelling of the iris, deposition of cells in the fluid in the *anterior chamber* (*hypopyon*) and possibly a constriction of the *pupil*, we will strongly consider the condition *anterior uveitis*. This is an inflammation of the globe of the eye itself and is a very nasty disease process.

If the pupil in a red eye is dilated and the eye is bulging, we might consider *glaucoma* as a diagnosis. This is a true ocular emergency. In this case there might be *oedema* (swelling) of the *cornea*,

which appears as cloudiness, and possibly blindness. The pressure of the globe can be measured with an instrument called a *tonometer* to confirm this diagnosis.

Is there blood in the anterior chamber or active bleeding in the conjunctiva or the sclera? If so, the disease process may not be originating in the eye itself but may be caused by a process elsewhere in the body, such as a trauma or a blood-clotting disorder.

A full physical examination is important for accurate diagnosis. If a pet has one red eye, no globe involvement, and an otherwise normal clinical examination, a confident diagnosis of unilateral conjunctivitis can be made. However, if there are two red eyes plus evidence of uveitis, we have to consider the possibility of disease elsewhere in the body. The eyes can truly be windows to the soul in this case. Diseases such as *lymphoma*, *pyometra*, *toxoplasmosis*, *feline immunodeficiency virus*, *feline leukaemia virus*, and *feline peritonitis* can all lead to uveitis. To ignore the body and treat only the eyes in these cases would be folly.

The conditions that can cause a red eye range from mildly annoying to vision threatening, even life threatening. An owner must *never* ignore a red eye in the hope that it will just go away. Prompt medical attention is essential to differentiate between the possible causes and provide appropriate treatment in order to avert blindness or worse.



Laughter
is the best
medicine!

A panda walks into a restaurant, sits down and orders a sandwich. He eats the sandwich, pulls out a gun and shoots the waiter dead.

As the panda stands up to go, the manager shouts, "Hey! Where are you going? You just shot my waiter and you didn't pay for your sandwich!"

The panda yells back at the manager, "Hey man, I'm a PANDA! Look it up!"

The manager opens his dictionary and sees the following definition for Panda: "A tree dwelling marsupial of Asian origin, characterised by distinct black and white coloring. Eats shoots and leaves."

Pet Insurance

There are at least seven different companies offering pet insurance these days, and the number continues to grow. Have you considered pet insurance for your furry family members? Pet insurance gives you the added security of knowing that no matter what life throws at you, you will be able to care for your pet's health in the way you want. So how does it work?

- All policies offer 80% refund irrespective of the pet's age.
- All policies offer continuing cover where a chronic medical condition is diagnosed e.g. arthritis, skin disease
- No policy excludes hereditary or congenital conditions from insurance.
- There are a choice of excess up-front payments by the owner, depending on the company and policy type. This excess does not increase as the pet ages.
- Joining ages are limited to a maximum of 9 years of age, and a minimum of 8 weeks.
- Once joined, all policies extend to lifetime cover.
- No waiting period for accident claims, and a 30 day waiting period for health claims.
- Premiums vary from \$11-\$60 per month to \$19-\$71 per month, depending on the policy selected.

Should you wish for any further information, contact us.

Golden Oldies in the Spotlight!

On July 22nd, East Port Veterinary Hospital hosted its first Senior's Night at Sails resort – for senior pets, that is! Fifty clients caring for Senior pets attended the night, and listened to presentations on Senior Nutrition, Osteoarthritis and our new Seniors Program. At East Port, it has long been our mission to help prevent health problems in pets, rather than attempting to treat them late in the game. As part of this ethic, we have created a Seniors Program, involving twice yearly health checks, once yearly blood tests and tailored medication monitoring and screening programs for each individual. Considering most pets age an average of 7 human years per 1 pet year, these measures should help to pick health problems up early, allowing them to be treated. Many health problems identified late in the disease process do not have good outcomes for the patient. East Port's new Seniors Program should help to keep our golden oldies happy and healthy for longer.

Goodbye to Dr Amy Lee

Dr Amy Lee will be leaving us on the 22nd August, bound for Sydney. Amy is very sad to be leaving her extended family at East Port, but is planning to return in 3 years time, when her partners work commitments allow her to. In her sabbatical from East Port, Amy plans to sit her membership examinations in Internal Medicine, and continue to develop her veterinary skills. She will miss all of her furry and feathered patients very much, and wishes you all the best!

Bec's tying the knot!

Dr Rebecca Tucker and her partner, Darren Shaw, have gotten engaged after 5 years together. Planning their wedding for early next year, we wish the couple every happiness.