

## Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow..?

Many of us wish for snowy weather, but for others it's a source of dread, so hopefully our Winter Survival Guide will help. For this, and other news and advice, read on!

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## A Winter Survival Guide for Pets

*White Christmas or not, if the cold weather starts to bite, here's how to help your pets cope.*

In freezing temperatures, hypothermia can occur after just a few minutes and it can kill. Our pets are more at risk than we are as they are smaller and prevention is always better than cure, so don't leave pets outside in freezing temperatures without access to shelter and warmth. Cars act like fridges in cold weather, so don't leave pets in them unattended. If your dog has a short coat, use a warm dog coat in colder weather - or even better on dark mornings and evenings, a warm, high visibility coat.

Prevent snowballs from forming by trimming the hair between your dog's toes and wipe their paws after walks to remove any salt or chemicals and prevent chapping - unless your dog wears snow boots.

Beware of antifreeze! It smells and tastes good to animals, but is extremely poisonous, so make sure it is stored well out of reach (of children as well as animals) and spills are cleaned up quickly.

If your pet can be tempted outside to exercise and the temperature will allow, that's great - bundle up and take your dog for a brisk walk. Start out quickly and only allow pausing and sniffing on the return route, but ensure dogs don't run onto frozen waterways. They could fall into icy water if the ice is too thin.

If the cold weather keeps you inside, here are some fun ways to keep your pet exercised and entertained:

- Fetch: great for dogs and cats.
- Hide and seek: low-calorie treats hidden around the house provide cats with mental stimulation.

- Food puzzle toys to make dogs or cats work to get their food.
- Laser pointer: a great chase game for dogs and cats.
- String: a cheap and easy cat toy and a great way to get them up and moving, as long as they don't try to eat it.

Your pet might see snow as a novelty, but don't let them eat it - dangerous objects or chemicals may be hidden in it and it can cause stomach upset and even hypothermia if ingested.

Make sure that there is somewhere warm and cosy for your cat or dog to sleep. Pets with arthritis will feel more discomfort when it's cold so try to keep those older pets as warm as you can. Cats will curl up next to anything hot to keep warm - take care when starting your car as that can include climbing under the bonnet!

Provide outdoor pets, such as guinea pigs and rabbits with extra bedding and be prepared to move them into a shed or unused garage for extra shelter while it is cold, but don't house animals, or birds, in greenhouses or conservatories due to the temperature changes.

Regular pet health checks help to keep your pet in good health all year round and are a great time to get pet care advice and share any concerns you may have. The Clockhouse 'Paws and Claws' plan helps to spread the cost of regular check ups and get discounts on treatments. If you're not yet a Paws and Claws member, ask at reception for details, or give us a call on 01453 752555.

# Treats that pets should never eat.

Over the Christmas and New Year period especially, many of us buy in 'festive' food and drink. It may be richer fare than usual or just different to what you normally have in the house, but some foods could ruin your year if eaten by your pet:

**Chocolate** - even small amounts can cause convulsions and heart problems. The darker the chocolate, the more toxic it is. White chocolate does not contain enough theobromine to be toxic, but can be fatty and pose a potential risk of pancreatitis.

**Dried vine fruits** (grapes, sultanas, raisins) - even a small quantity can cause severe kidney failure, so keep food that contains dried fruits (e.g. Christmas pudding, mince pies) out of reach. Chocolate-coated raisins run the additional risk of chocolate toxicity.

**Onions, garlic, leeks, shallots and chives** are toxic to pets, whether uncooked or cooked, causing vomiting, diarrhoea and damage to red blood cells resulting in anaemia, which may take several days to become apparent.

**Alcohol** - keep unattended alcohol out of pets' reach. In severe cases of alcohol ingestion there is a risk of low body temperature, low blood sugar and coma.

**Macadamia nuts** can cause lethargy, high body temperature, tremor, lameness and stiffness in dogs.

**Leftovers** should be disposed of carefully, out of reach of pets, as they could include dangerous or toxic ingredients. Mould in leftovers (inc. yoghurt, bread

and cheese) can produce toxins that cause rapid onset convulsions in dogs.

The artificial sweetener '**xylitol**' can induce the release of insulin in dogs, resulting in low blood sugar and possible liver damage. Signs of poisoning can be rapid or delayed, and include vomiting, lethargy, convulsions and comas. The prognosis is good if the low blood sugar is treated quickly.

**Nicotine** is toxic to dogs and cigarette butts are especially dangerous, so it's important not to leave them in ashtrays, or on the ground, in reach of dogs.

**Uncooked bread dough** can be very dangerous to cats and dogs, so if you're a keen baker, leave your dough to rise out of reach of pets and don't give them dough as a treat.

While starting the day with a cup of 'real' coffee may work for you, **caffeine** can kill cats and dogs, so dispose of coffee grinds carefully.

**Avocados** contain Persin, which is toxic to birds, large animals (such as horses and cattle), goats, rabbits and guinea pigs. Avocado fruit has not been found to be toxic for dogs and cats. The primary danger of avocados to dogs and cats is the possibility of them swallowing the large pit, which could cause a blockage or obstruction in the animal's oesophagus, stomach or intestinal tract, so be sure not to let your dog or cat eat a whole avocado or the avocado pit.

As a veterinary hospital, we are staffed at all times, so if you have an emergency, give us a call on 01453 752555. Calling first enables us to prepare for your emergency and call in any extra staff necessary ahead of your arrival.





# Choosing a new pet? We can help.

*Pet ownership is a fantastic, rewarding experience and even good for our health. But for those planning to give a new pet a 'forever home', here are some points to consider to help you to choose the right one.*

You might think that small pets would be great 'first pets' for small children - but most aren't: hamsters are nocturnal, so would prefer to be asleep while children want to play; gerbils and mice are speedy, tricky for small hands to pick up without squeezing and like to explore things with their teeth; and rabbits are prey animals so don't always appreciate being picked up and cuddled. On the other hand, rats are lively and intelligent and love social interaction with people, which means they make great pets.

Your lifestyle needs to be taken into account in your hunt for the right pet: who would walk your dog if you're out all day? Will you have the time and energy to walk a dog that needs lots of exercise or would a more sedentary breed be better for you? Does any of your family have asthma or allergies? Would your cat have access to safe outside space? It's worth taking time to research the size, temperament, exercise requirements, lifespan and health predispositions of different pets and breeds to see if they'd fit in with family's routine.

If you yearn for a pedigree dog or cat, ask your vet or the Kennel Club to tell you what you need to look for and the questions you need to ask a breeder - and get them to recommend a good breeder.

Bearing in mind that some pedigree breeds have inbuilt health issues, it may be well worth considering a rescue pet. As lovely as it is to get a kitten or a puppy, an adult rescue pet can be a great choice. Their personalities are established, so you can be more confident about whether or not they will fit into your family and lifestyle. They will also be neutered, microchipped and vaccinated and possibly even

trained, which cuts down on the expense of training and new furniture. Plus, you'll have saved a dog from a long term stay in kennels.

Do your sums and ensure that you can cope with the financial commitment - the right pet insurance can help a lot in that respect.

**Don't** impulse buy, no matter how gorgeous they are or how longingly they look at you.

**Don't buy online** or from breeders offering multiple breeds or types of pets - they may be commercial dealers (puppy 'farmers') with little interest in the welfare of the pets they sell. There can't be much more heart breaking than taking your gorgeous puppy home, bonding with it and then finding out it has something badly wrong with it and having to have it put to sleep.

For further advice about getting a new pet, or introducing a new pet to an existing pet, please give us a call on 01453 752555.



## Bargain cat carriers help wildlife rescue

Veterinary Nurse, Genevieve Holmes, is steam cleaning second hand cat baskets, donated when a beloved cat has passed away and offering them for sale at just £7 each, with all proceeds going to Oak and Furrows Wildlife Rescue Centre, our first point of call when we treat any injured wildlife.

Their dedicated team (staff, volunteers, friends and supporters) takes in over 3,000 wildlife casualties and receives around 7,000 telephone calls for help and advice annually. The Wildlife Rescue Service operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year, without any government funding and relies on donations to survive. Their aim is to provide care for wild animals in need so that they can be returned to the wild fit and healthy for a second chance.

The cat carriers are available for sale in reception and we're always happy to take new donations. If you'd like to help Oak and Furrows in other ways, they always need donations of newspapers, tinned pet food, old towels and tea towels.



## Is it time to throw sticks in the bin?



Throwing a stick for your dog while out walking can be as much fun for most dog owners as it is for their dogs and most of the time it is just good fun and a bit more exercise for the dog.

It's when things go awry that your view of sticks can change.

Vets see some serious, life threatening or even fatal injuries to dogs caused by fetching sticks, either because they've landed in the ground like a javelin or because they've split in the dog's mouth.

Terms like 'penetrative wound' or 'impaled' can make your blood run cold, but if a stick becomes lodged in the ground and your dog can't stop in time, there's a strong chance of them suffering penetrative wounds, blood loss or worse if they run onto the stick.

For some dogs it's chewing on sticks that can cause a problem as they can splinter in the dog's mouth. If the splinters get lodged in the teeth, soft tissue or tongue this can cause pain, abscesses or dental problems.

While exercise and play is hugely beneficial to dogs

and their owners, both from a health and a bonding perspective, rubber toys or frisbees may prove the better option.

If you have a puppy, it's worth resisting the option to throw sticks for them from the outset - they're not born with the instinct to play with sticks so if they are not trained to see sticks as exciting playthings, they'll happily chase, fetch and chew something else instead.

For dogs that are already drawn to sticks, getting them interested in a new toy may provide a good distraction, or there are a number of ways to train them away from chasing sticks, the easiest being the 'off' command (training a dog to recognise when you want it to stop doing something by giving or withholding treats).

Whether you throw sticks for your dog or not, it's well worth having pet insurance in place in case of any kind of accident or injury, so your pet can have whatever treatment they need, when they need it.

If you would like advice about training or pet insurance or have concerns about your pet's health, please give us a call on 01453 752555.

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