



AutumnNewsletter 2015

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Pet emergency plans

If we have learnt anything over the last few years it is that bushfires and other natural disasters are an ever more frequent event in Australia.

All too frequently Australians lose their lives trying to save their pets in an emergency, as do many pets themselves. So in the event of a natural disaster do you have a plan for your pets?

As part of your emergency survival plan, allowing for your pets can save lives: yours and theirs.

Move large animals a few days in advance of severe conditions.

Keep your house pets close at hand in catastrophic conditions.

Ensure all pets are microchipped and have an ID tag. Prepare a pet emergency kit containing

- adequate water
- leads and collars
- carry cages for smaller pets
- any essential medications
- vaccination certificates, in case you need to board your pets
- favourite toys

It is a good idea to get your pets used to carriers and car trips ahead of time.

Be prepared and you and your pets can safely negotiate natural disasters.



Termites, or white ants as they are commonly known are neither a mite, nor an ant. They are in fact most closely related to the coachroach.

Sarcoptic mange

Scabies, or sarcoptic mange, is a relatively uncommon but severely itchy skin disease of dogs, and sometimes cats. It can be particularly problematic in that the signs can easily be confused with those of skin allergies: a much more common complaint in pet animals. Animals of any age can be affected but in animals over seven years, who develop skin disease for the first time the chances of it being sarcoptic mange increase. Sarcoptic mange is caused by a parasite *Sarcoptes scabiei*, a mite which can spend its whole life cycle on your pet (some parasites like fleas and roundworm have at least one stage of their life-cycle off the pet in the environment). This mite prefers to live on dogs but can also infect cats, foxes and people.

Though the mite prefers to stay on its host it can survive in the environment for up to 21 days if dislodged. Dogs and cats are commonly infected by going in to contaminated environments, particularly those frequented by foxes.

Sarcoptes burrows through the skin creating tunnels that will be used to lay eggs. Over a period of time, usually a few weeks after exposure, animals become allergic to the mites and start to develop allergic reactions of increasing severity

How is *Sarcoptes* diagnosed?

The gold standard of diagnosis is to see the mites on skin samples. However relatively few mites can cause severe reactions so many samples may be needed to make a diagnosis, and finding no mites does not rule it out completely. These days safe and effective treatment options are available, so trial therapy is often a more practical option (see later section on treatment)



How are pets affected.

The symptoms of scabies are varied, but usually include hair loss and severe itching especially on the elbows, ears, armpits, hocks, chest, and ventral abdomen. The mites prefer to live on areas of the skin that have less hair. As the infection worsens it can spread over the entire body. Skin infections are a common sequellae. Because of the severe itching and resultant scratching, the skin soon becomes traumatized and a variety of sores and infections can develop as a result.

In passing people who catch the disease from animals usually have minor itching that resolves spontaneously.

Treatment

Traditionally this has been a challenge as the effective agents were quite toxic to pets and people. These days many safe treatments are available. Many topical flea preparations such as Revolution kill this mite. As mentioned earlier this can be used as a diagnostic tool as well as a treatment.

As the environment will also be contaminated, cleaning pets beds is advisable. More importantly treat all dogs and cats in the house, even those showing no signs, and keep treating for a number of months to avoid the risk of reinfestation.

In individual patients further treatment is often required to control secondary problems such as bacterial infection.

Temporary medications to control the itching are also often indicated.

Animals with this disease often become more itchy for the first few days of treatment as the mites die, before showing a dramatic improvement.

For further information please contact the practice

Most mites are host specific: only surviving on one species of animal.

Dogs develop an allergy to *Sarcoptes* that causes most of the irritation, not the mites themselves.

Sarcoptic mange can be mistaken for allergic skin disease as the signs are similar.

Foxes are a common reservoir for these mites.





Why can't I feed the cat with the kids?

Cats are obligate carnivores with very different dietary requirements to dogs, people, and other animals. So what is an obligate carnivore? This term refers to any animal which has an absolute requirement for meat in their diet, and will not stay healthy without it.

In the wild cats eat prey high in protein, with moderate amounts of fat, and relatively low levels of carbohydrate. However it is incorrect to assume that cats naturally eat meat only. Whilst they don't eat vegetable matter voluntarily, they will eat whole insects, and intestinal contents of other prey that will contain vegetable material. As such whilst being an obligate carnivore an all meat diet is not ideal.

Cats are just different! For example cats have a low demand for dietary fibre. Conversely they have an absolute requirement for taurine, an amino acid found in meat. In fact without it in their diet they can develop seizures and other neurological signs. Fibre decreases absorption of taurine from the intestine, so the more fibre a cat eats the more taurine they need in their food. The take home message really is that to feed a cat a diet appropriate to long term health, we cannot use feeding rules appropriate to people, dogs or other species.

However unlike most pack animals (who need to eat as much as possible before the other pack members do), cats being naturally solitary are usually good as self-regulating dietary intake. In fact less than 50% of cats will become overweight with ad lib feeding. This again differs for the dog and human situation.

Many good quality cat foods are now available for all stages of your cats life, allowing for all the unique needs of our feline friends. For more information on what diet is appropriate for your cat please contact the clinic.

Dolphins are also obligate carnivores.

Cats are a naturally solitary animal living in a territory of about 4ha. They come to the edge of their territory to breed then return to a solitary lifestyle.

That is why cats vocalize when they are on heat (hence the term 'calling').

Trout and many snakes are also obligate carnivores. And Polar bears might be: we don't quite know yet!

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