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Fulham Gardens Vet Surgery
(08) 8355 5475

Unley Vet Surgery
(08) 8272 3400

Black Forest Vet Surgery
(08) 8351 6066



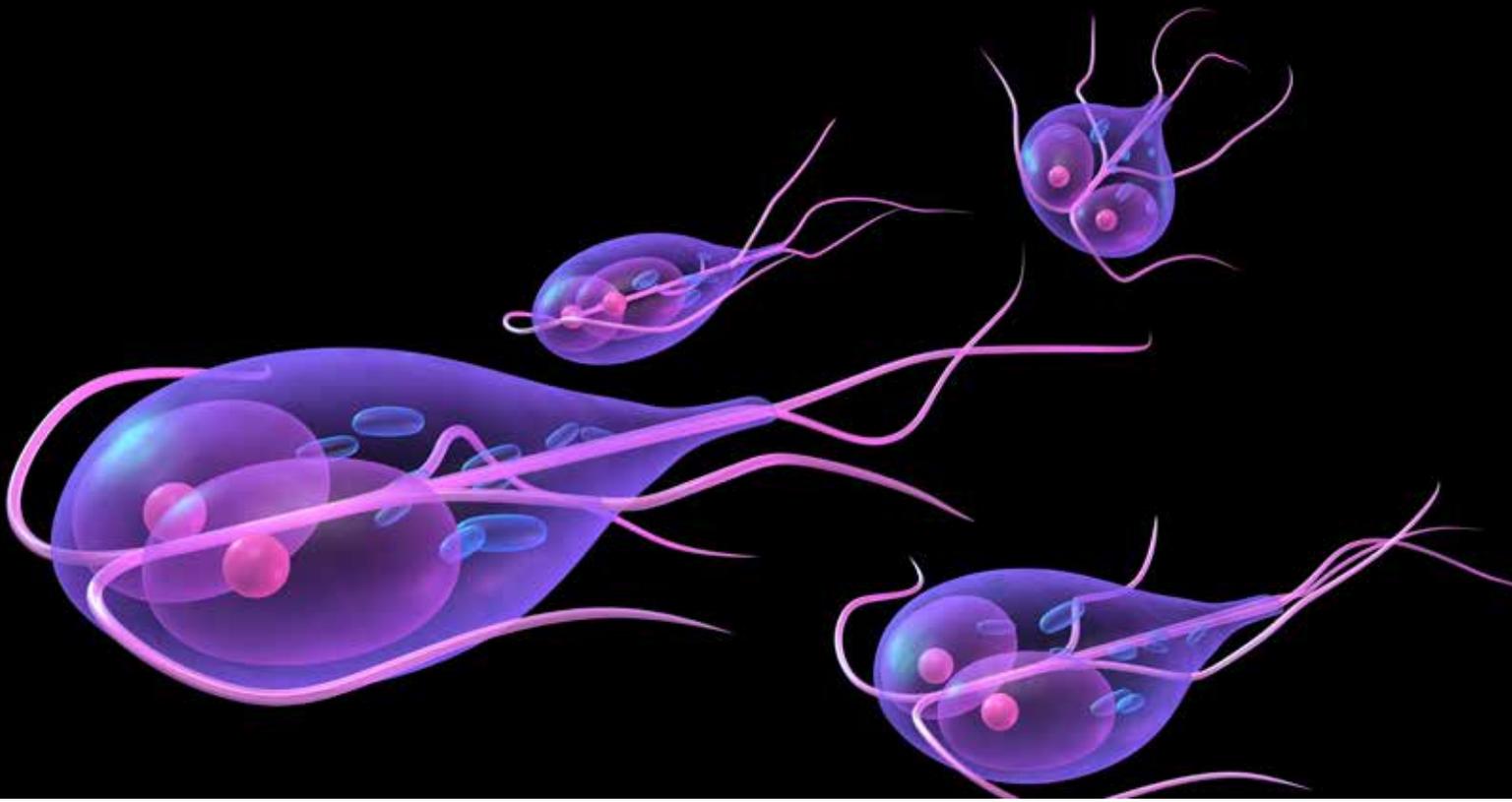
Llama Drama

Llamas and alpacas are related to camels and were domesticated by Native Americans over 5000 years ago. They were used by the Incas for meat, wool, hides, dung, and as a beast of burden, although they are not strong enough to pull any significant cart. This didn't matter as the Incas never invented a wheel. Or written language.

The only other animal domesticated by the Incas was the guinea pig.

So important were the llamas to the Incas, that their empire was limited by its geographic range. It appears the reason the Incas never bumped in to the Aztecs in Central America, was the humble llama couldn't get there. However their empire was still over 5000km long!

Like camels, llamas are intelligent and gregarious herbivores, but when upset or annoyed, they tend to hiss, kick, and refuse to move, often lying down in protest. They will also projectile regurgitate (often called 'spitting') at people or animals who annoy them. Don't say we didn't warn you!



- The term Protozoa means first animal.
- They are a very early life form in evolutionary terms.
- They are single celled, but can be relatively large.
- Many have a flagellum, or tail, so can actually move themselves around.
- They ingest food by engulfing it in a membrane then absorbing it, rather like something out of science fiction stories!
- Malaria, African sleeping sickness, and toxoplasmosis are also caused by protozoa .
- Malaria is spread by mosquitoes and sleeping sickness by the tsetse fly.

Giardiasis or Beaver Fever

Giardiasis (or Beaver fever as it is known in the US) is a common protozoal disease which can cause gastrointestinal problems (diarrhoea, bloating, and cramping), as well as weight loss and lethargy. A number of species including dogs, cats, cows, sheep and people can become infected.

Dogs and cats are most commonly infected by drinking contaminated water. It is unclear as to how readily transmission occurs between pets and people, it being more likely they both become infected from the same environment. It is certainly true child care centres and the like pose a common risk of infection in people.

Infected animals show a range of clinical signs, from quite severe to totally unaffected. In the latter case however, animals can still be a source of contamination, spreading the infection.

Giardia is usually diagnosed by faecal examination, although repeat tests over a few days may be necessary to confirm its presence. More specialized testing (called ELISA testing) can also be done and is slightly more accurate.

Giardia is readily treatable, and washing feeding bowls and bedding in a household disinfectant is also recommended during treatment.

It has been estimated over 200 million people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have clinical giardiasis.

This compares to malaria where an estimated 300-600 million people a year are affected, of whom about 1 million die annually.



For dogs

- The best time is often when you let your dog out first thing in the morning. Have a clean plastic open container handy and try to catch a bit of urine. A few mls is usually enough.

For Cats

- If your cat does or will use a litter tray, replace the normal litter with plastic beads or possibly torn up paper. You should then be able to draw some urine up in to a syringe, that we can provide for you

Urine testing for pets

One of the easiest and most underrated laboratory tests we can do is urinalysis.

A small amount of urine can give us information about your pet's internal health, and rule out problems such as kidney disease and diabetes.

As part of a routine urine test, we usually test how concentrated your pet's urine is. This gives us insight into your pet's kidney function. We may also test for the presence of blood, look at pH, protein levels and glucose and spin the urine down to form a sediment to look for bacteria and crystals. Sometimes it is necessary to send your pet's urine to an external laboratory for testing. They can test to find the best antibiotics for an infection, to get more information on what types of protein are present, and sometimes for toxin testing. Snake venom for example can be detected in urine.

See the side boxes for tips on collecting urine. Often a voided sample is all we need, but if we need a sterile sample we collect one by using a procedure called cystocentesis. During this procedure we pass a very fine needle in to the bladder, often guided by ultrasound.

We will advise you if your pet needs a urine test but remember, if you think your pet's urination habits have changed it is best to phone us for advice.

And speaking of parasites (see the previous page) Shistosomes, a human bladder parasite, have been found in Egyptian mummies from 1200BC. Schistosomiasis is still the second most common parasitic disease in Africa today.



Environmental enrichment for cats.

Environmental enrichment is a term used to describe any change you can make to your pet's environment to improve their welfare. Perhaps counter intuitively it may involve removing things from their environment. For example if your cat doesn't like the vacuum cleaner, removing it will be enriching for your cat.

Typically environmental enrichment covers animate and inanimate objects. However what works depends on the desires of your particular cat. For example some cats love other cats, so getting your cat a new kitten may make their world a happier place. And some cats hate other cats so it will have exactly the opposite effect. Likewise cats have differing views towards new people, dogs, and other animals. Some like them some don't.

Cats are naturally a solitary predator. As such they like hiding, watching, and hunting!

Try to give cats a high vantage point where they can look out of a window. You may also have noticed that your cat likes hiding in cupboards. A covered box or bed can be very comforting. If you get cardboard boxes leave them lying around for a few days so that your cat can hide in them. Constantly getting new boxes for them to explore makes them more interesting.

Cats like to chase and hunt. Naturally they will watch a mouse hole for hours, until the mouse comes out, then pounce. As such it appears not to cause frustration if they can't necessarily catch the hunted item. For example disco lights or a mirror ball create reflections that many cats like to chase. Suspended toys, particularly in areas where there is a breeze so that they move, can entertain your cat. Tie an alfoil ball to a piece of string and loop it around your foot. As you walk around the house your cat may chase the alfoil. Throw paper or alfoil balls around the lounge room for them to chase. Numerous interactive toys exist for cats that often dispense food, or create random movements that engage your cat.

Cats are a desert animal, so can be quite captivated by water. Drinking fountains can not only provide environmental enrichment, but can also encourage them to drink more water than they otherwise would, decreasing the risk of kidney disease.