

# smalltalk

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

WINTER 2015

## Noise Phobias

Plan ahead this  
Bonfire Night



Inside...

### Toxic Treats

Tasty treats that are toxic  
to your dog or cat



### Puppy Farming

Where is your Christmas  
puppy coming from?



### Neutering

Your questions  
answered



Children  
and dogs...



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Veterinary Care



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Veterinary Care**

## XLVets and Your Practice - what does it mean?

Many people may not realise the benefits of their local independent practice being part of XLVets - as indeed I did not when I first joined my practice.

I have spent most of my career in independent practice in various parts of the country, before joining Wright and Morten Vets in Macclesfield in early 2015. Working in the independent sector was always my preference - I like the teamwork, flexibility and hard graft that is essential to keep a small business running successfully. However, I had never worked at an XLVets practice.

Being part of a larger co-operative group whilst retaining independence has been an eye-opener for me - especially considering my previous experience in other practices. The biggest benefit that I see is the excellence in care that we strive to provide for your pets. Although vets all over the world aim for this, XLVets are in a unique position where collaborative effort reaps individual benefits.

A good example is to consider the Charity Challenge that XLVets are undertaking this year to celebrate their 10th Anniversary. Between all the member practices, we will be travelling a distance equivalent to going around the world under our own power - any mode of transport is allowed so long as there is no engine involved! The total distance to cover is some 23,500 miles. Imagine trying to achieve something like that in a sole independent practice - it would never happen! Only by working together can such targets be reached. Likewise the clinical care of your pet benefits from having a huge pool of vets to discuss cases - something that isn't so readily available if your practice is not a member.

As the new kid on the block in an XLVets practice, I realise now I am very lucky to have had the chance to work within the group, and I hope that you will be able to appreciate the benefits as much as I have.

**Pete Andrew BVSc MRCVS**  
Wright & Morten Veterinary Group

# Toxic treats

With Christmas fast approaching, and an abundance of tasty treats appearing in the shops, you are no doubt looking forward to indulging - nuts, cake and chocolate.



### By Severn Edge Veterinary Group

Often it's tempting to share these tasty treats with your pets, but do you know which one of the options are highly toxic to your dog or cat?

**All of them!** Top of the list is chocolate which can be extremely poisonous to both cats and dogs. The darker the chocolate (i.e. more cocoa content) the worse it is. The problem is caused by theobromine, which is found in chocolate, as well as in a number of other foods, including the leaves of the tea plant and the kola nut. Dogs and cats metabolise theobromine more slowly compared to humans and can get poisoned from as little as 50 grams of milk chocolate.

Even very small amounts of chocolate can cause diarrhoea, vomiting, depression, seizures and heart attacks. Remember to let your guests know to save the chocolate for themselves, keeping your animals safe.

It's also important to plan ahead; I'll bet that underneath

almost every Christmas tree there are a few kilograms of chocolate. Dogs with their keen sense of smell can detect the delicious aroma of chocolate through the wrapping paper, and it takes an incredibly well behaved pooch to just ignore all of that temptation! Wherever possible, try to keep chocolate gifts out of reach before Christmas day and keep an eye on your pooch when the mayhem commences.

Chocolate isn't the only thing to watch out for - you should avoid giving your pets fruit cake, grapes and raisins. These can cause vomiting and diarrhoea, but more seriously, they can lead to kidney failure as soon as 48 hours after ingestion. Equally, if you use xylitol as an artificial sweetener in baking, it can cause a rapid and severe drop in blood sugar, often within 2 hours.

This causes vomiting, sleepiness, fitting, collapse and coma. Also, peanuts and monkey nuts can cause vomiting and diarrhoea, and more seriously fitting, twitching and muscle spasm.

Other dangers around the home are hidden in the beauty of the decorative plants and flowers. Lilies, Holly, Poinsettia and Mistletoe are all poisonous if eaten, and should be avoided if possible.

If you know of, or suspect ingestion of, any toxin or toy you must call your vet as soon as possible. The faster treatment can start, the more likely your pet is to survive.

**By following these simple tips, you can be sure of a very enjoyable festive season with your four legged friends!**



By Steve Leonard BVSc, MRCVS Leonard Brothers Veterinary Centre

# NEUTERING?



Will neutering  
make me fat..?

Will neutering make  
me more sociable?

Can neutering  
increase my risk to  
certain diseases?

With just over 9 million dogs and almost 9 million cats in the UK you'd think that whether to neuter would be a simple question. However, we don't treat cats and dogs as merely numbers, they are individuals and need to be treated as such.

**N**eutering for the veterinary team is a daily event but we try to remember that for this particular patient it is a once in a lifetime event and therefore their owner may have fears, questions and concerns. Unfortunately we are living through an age where it is easier to 'google' than call and there is a lot of apparently contradictory information out there regarding the benefits and risks of neutering.

Certainly the surgery itself is much lower risk than it used to be thanks to innovations

in anaesthesia, pain relief and surgical materials, such as synthetic absorbable sutures. However, it's the long term effects that most owners are concerned about, behavioural or personality changes, risks of obesity and risks of serious diseases. This is where the internet myths start to rear their heads...

### Neutering makes pets fat?

Neutering definitely lowers a pet's requirement for calories so if you feed your pet the same amount after neutering as before, then weight gain is very likely. Adjusting the calories in a pet's diet after neutering is advised. Either a reduction in volume fed or swapping to a lower calorie diet. Check your pet's weight regularly after neutering to make sure it's stable.

### Neutering changes pets personalities?

In dogs neutering has far less effect on behaviour than previously thought. It's certainly not a substitute for good training. Aggression in dogs can be improved by castration if it's dog to dog aggression but a nervous dog with people may be made worse, so speak to your vet to get their advice. Cats and rabbits are far more sociable pets after neutering making them less likely to fight and wander off. With regards to

your pet's personality - it will still be the lovable member of the family it was before.

### Neutering increases the risk of certain diseases?

There have been a number of very large studies looking at this area. It's important for us to know, are we doing right by our patients, when we recommend any procedure. We do know that there are increased risks of some diseases, such as incontinence and certain tumours in neutered pets, but it is also protection against others. Certain breeds of dogs will be advised to have at least one season in some cases to help prevent incontinence in later life whereas in other breeds this may be of no concern.

### In summary...

It is a complicated picture, but really the simplest questions are often the best and 'If I neuter my pet will they live longer?' is probably the place to start.

A massive study of over 40,000 dogs in 2013 concluded that neutered dogs do tend to live longer, which is good to know.

# Where is your Christmas puppy? coming from ●



If you were planning to buy a puppy for Christmas, then think again!

An interview with  
**Marc Abraham**  
**BVM&S MRCVS**

Winner of 'Vet of the Year'  
CEVA Animal Welfare  
Awards 2014.

Founder of PUP AID campaign  
against puppy farming.

Puppy farming is the mass commercial production of puppies purely for profit and without a thought for the welfare or happiness of the pup, breeding bitch, or stud dogs. On puppy farms the breeding dogs and pups are usually kept in horrific dark conditions, totally unsocialised and riddled with both

infectious and hereditary, often incurable, diseases. These poorly pups are then sold en masse to pet shops, garden centres, online, or from free newspaper ads and usually die soon after reaching their new home.

Marc Abraham is the founder of PUP AID, which was set up to raise awareness as well as



eradicate points of sale of irresponsibly bred pets. 'To legally sell in the UK all you need is a pet shop licence, and it doesn't matter where puppies come from in the world they just need this licence, a licence which is ridiculously easy to obtain.' Says Marc. He continues, 'Puppies brought in and sold from abroad should be terrifying people, as they are loaded with diseases, such as Rabies, Parvovirus and Echinococcus, and often have serious behavioural problems too'.

However, do not think that puppy farms can only be found abroad. They are a growing business in the UK and, besides being sold through pet shops, are often advertised online by fake breeders, who set up in



houses to convince the public they are genuine. Marc says that there are ways to tell if a breeder is genuine or not. 'It is very unlikely that a genuine breeder will have more than one breed. If you go to buy a puppy and see multiple breeds advertised then it should immediately raise a 'red flag'. Check to see if mum is there and if the bitch that they say is mum is actually interacting with the puppies. Be prepared to say NO. A good breeder will not pressurise and will advise you to come back when you are ready. If it is a scam then the atmosphere will change immediately and pressure will be put on you to buy'. Similarly, if the pups are in squalid conditions, don't buy to 'get a pup out' as you will only perpetuate the problem but, report it to the relevant authorities instead so that all the pups are saved.

Although the government needs to change the legislation and manage our borders better, it is also down to the public to stop buying from these outlets. Marc's advice, when considering buying a puppy, is to first ask yourself if you really need one. Do you have the time, money, space and patience required for this new addition to your family? He continues 'Go to a responsible breeder or consider getting your puppy/dog from a rescue centre. Rescue centres have changed massively over the years and mostly take

puppies and dogs whose owners have died, or can't cope, or have developed allergies. They have usually been well cared for and are checked for diseases and behavioural problems. You can still have a young dog, as the average age dogs are abandoned is 18 months, or you could put your name down for a puppy if you are willing to wait'.

Marc says, 'If we can change legislation and lose the 'pet shop licence' allowing buying in and selling young puppies, then we will save a lot of dogs from a terrible existence. While there is still this middleman, or 'dealer', the problems will continue. Even the drug dealers are turning to puppy farming as, not only is it very profitable, there are no harsh sentences as a deterrent'.

**If you would like to be part of the campaign to stop puppy farming then write to your local MP, DEFRA minister George Eustace, or visit the PUP AID website at [pupaid.org](http://pupaid.org).**

**Help STOP  
Puppy Farming**

# Noise Phobias and Fireworks

Approximately 80% of pets suffer from a phobia of loud noises.

A phobia is an intense often irrational fear of something which causes an extreme and excessive response. Noise phobia is common in all pets and often starts as a fear of a particular sound, e.g. gunshots, fireworks or thunder. However, if it becomes established it can develop into a fear of many everyday household noises such as fire alarms, doors slamming or even mobile phones. It's important to treat these phobias early before they escalate. Every firework season vets are approached by clients wanting sedatives for their pets to get them through this stressful period. We can prescribe this medication but this is just a temporary fix for a bigger problem.

The best way to help noise phobic dogs is to desensitise them to the sounds that they react to. There is a range of CDs available for this purpose, which come with full instructions to help you use the programme effectively.

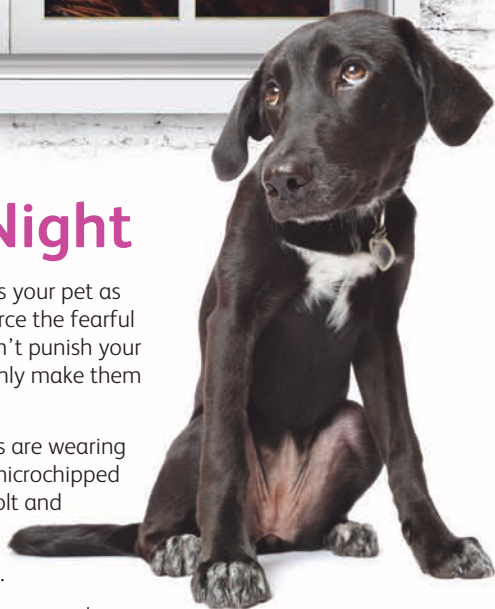
To summarise, they involve gradually exposing your dog to increasingly loud noises over several weeks and months until your pet is no longer distressed even at the loudest level. It is important to start these programmes well before the firework season starts.

Other things which may help include pheromone diffusers, collars or sprays. These release a synthetic copy of pheromones naturally released by a mother to its offspring to comfort and reassure them. Valerian products are another alternative which enhance the production of GABA, a natural chemical produced by the brain transmitted from nerve to nerve as a calming message when the body is stressed. These again come as either a spray or diffuser. Another useful product is the 'thunder shirt' which helps to comfort your dog during times of stress, by swaddling him/her.

These products don't always work instantly and it is advised to start using them in the weeks before a predicted stressful time. Contact your vet for more information.







## TIPS for Bonfire Night

- Keep pets indoors and exercise them while it is still light outside so that they are tired in the evening.
- A high content carbohydrate evening meal such as pasta or rice can help them relax.
- Close windows and curtains to dampen the noise and turn on the lights to reduce the effects of flashes. Play music to drown out bangs.
- Allow your pet to hide away somewhere safe. ie under furniture, behind the sofa, under the stairs. Cats feel more comfortable high up.
- New toys or food treats can act as a distraction.
- Stay calm yourself. Pets are reassured by a calm owner. Act normal and don't comfort or fuss your pet as this can reinforce the fearful behaviour. Don't punish your pet. This will only make them more uneasy.
- Make sure pets are wearing collars or are microchipped in case they bolt and become lost.
- Close cat flaps.
- Don't leave your pets alone. They will be more relaxed with a familiar face around.
- If you know another dog that is not scared by noises keeping them together may help your dog realise that there is no need to be afraid.
- Move hutches or cages indoors or cover them to dampen the noise. Provide extra bedding to burrow into.

**Try and plan ahead - it is easier to keep a calm animal happy than to try and calm a frightened one.**

**By Emma Clarke  
BVet Med (Hons) MRCVS  
Kingsway Veterinary Group**

# Children and dogs...

By **Laura Binnie BVMS BSc MRCVS**  
Paragon Veterinary Group



## A winning combination or a disaster waiting to happen?

Your answer to this is likely to be based on your past experiences, good, bad or ugly.

**W**e can't get away from the fact that there has been a rise in hospital admissions as a result of dog bites by 37% between 2007 and 2013 (Channel 4, 2014).

### Is there such a thing as a dog breed that is safe for children?

Probably not, we see such a variety of characteristics among individuals of a breed so there can be no guarantee that one breed would be ideal. The Kennel Club make an attempt to generalise breeds to their suitability to fitting in to a wholesome family life, though I would urge owners to take this advice with caution. For instance, they have suggested that the Labrador Retriever is a 'real gentleman, the Labrador adores children and has a kind and loving nature and a confident air' (kennelclub.org.uk). I know a few Labradors that would love to devour children and some that would do their utmost to avoid them at all costs. But I also know some that will allow children to climb all over them and tug on their ears without showing any reaction.

### So what went wrong?

Socialisation and training is the answer. Puppies should be regularly and appropriately socialised from between

two and 16 weeks of age, including interaction with children. This will start with the breeder and in their first homes. Puppies that have started their lives, undisturbed in a peaceful barn in the countryside may sound idyllic but in actual fact will have far less exposure to everyday challenges than those that were born in the middle of a busy hectic family, in the dam's bed next to the washing machine. The pups from the latter scenario will be better placed for lives with families and will be more confident and happy in themselves. Our referral canine behaviourist says pups from such a situation will suffer fewer fears and phobias and will make better all-round pets.

There are many health and developmental benefits to children that grow up with

dogs. Typically the children (and the dog) will engage in more outdoor physical activities, develop a better immune system with fewer allergies, will learn respect, empathy and compassion, will learn responsibility and have better social skills than those that grow up without pet dogs. It is imperative that the child respects the dog and both dog and child know each other's boundaries. Children should not be allowed to chase or taunt, take food or treats from dogs, and must never be left unsupervised together.

**For more information and advice go to [rspca.org.uk/safeandhappy](http://rspca.org.uk/safeandhappy) or visit [dogonesafe.com/Dog\\_Safety\\_For\\_Kids](http://dogonesafe.com/Dog_Safety_For_Kids) for information and videos for kids about dog body language and safety around dogs.**



## Pet Fraud

'In brief' news item from  
Veterinary Times September  
14th 2015

The UK police National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (Action Fraud) has warned of a rise in the purchase of pets, particularly puppies, advertised for sale on online auction websites. It says fraudsters claim they are moving abroad and need to rehome the pets. Payment is made by money or bank transfer, but the pets don't materialise. Further advance payments are then demanded for courier charges, shipping fees and vet bills.



## Abandoned Cats

'In brief' news item  
from Veterinary Times  
September 14th 2015

Battersea Dogs and Cats Home has reported a near 20 percent increase in the number of cat and kitten admissions this year, compared to last. The latest include a four-year-old ginger tabby found in a plastic bag on a train and 11-week-old kittens found dumped in the woods inside a sealed black bag.

## wordsearch



BREED

FETCH

TAIL

DOG

S	S	D	F	X	R	J	I	L	T
J	O	R	U	E	T	U	P	U	L
G	Y	P	E	I	T	S	S	F	O
O	M	M	B	K	F	C	C	Y	T
H	L	B	S	F	S	I	H	A	A
A	A	Z	K	U	U	I	P	L	I
R	B	R	E	E	D	C	H	P	L
E	S	I	C	R	E	X	E	W	N
L	N	Z	B	P	W	T	V	J	K
Q	P	W	Y	I	B	D	K	S	A

EXERCISE

PLAYFUL

WHISKERS

RABBIT