

JIM'S PET PAGE



JIM HUGHES BVM&S, MRCVS

Has over 20 years experience in both small animal and large animal veterinary practice and is a director of Blake Veterinary Group Ltd

Now the festivities are over, the waistlines bigger and the bank balance emptier we are looking to shed some of the Christmas pudding calories and replenish our bank accounts. Most pets are naturally active but over the winter months their activity will fall and they can gain weight so they will also need some post Christmas attention.

An overweight pet is far more likely to have long term health problems. If you think your pet is a little more “cuddly” than usual, the first thing you should do is call your vet for a thorough examination to check for medical conditions that may be causing the weight gain. In the majority of cases of weight gain there are usually no underlying medical causes but obesity can lead to long term health problems including, diabetes, arthritis and heart disease. In these cases you should ask your vet about weight clinics. Most surgeries run them and they are often organised by the nurses for relatively little cost. These clinics will be able to advise you on diets and will be able to help and support you in monitoring and managing your pet’s weight.

Dogs

This is really a book in itself. Suffice to say a daily walk is the best idea as it benefits both pet and owner. In essence your dog’s weight reflects the balance between daily intake of calories versus calories burnt by exercise. In a natural situation, a dog would spend the majority of its day hunting for food burning up calories. In a domestic situation, the only hunting you dog usually needs to do is hunt for the food bowl! In essence, the more you exercise the more you can eat, or the way I look at it, a game of squash buys a pint of beer!



Cats

According to a recent report by Mintel, a market research company, dog ownership has dropped by 26% over the last twenty years, whilst cat ownership has remained static. Cats suit our hectic lives, being more self sufficient, less time consuming and cheaper to care for. Unfortunately, this has resulted in cats becoming more couch potato than the predator they started out as. Newspapers are forever quoting alarming facts on the public's increasing obesity, and the nations cats are going the same way. Grazing on the plentiful supply of food left out whilst we are at work only to clamber onto our laps when we come home from a hard day's work. They, like us, are only too happy to sit and snooze on the sofa in front of the TV. All that laziness, lack of exercise and excessive food intake will causes obesity; no different from ourselves!



The simple answer is regular play. Cats are naturally curious animals and small fast-moving objects will cause the innate chase response right from when they are kittens. Most mature cats will continue to show it, particularly when they have practiced it all their lives. Try rolling small balls such as one of those practice golf balls which have holes in, or even easier, a scrunched up piece of paper tied to piece of string and pulled erratically will get their interest. Some people even tie these objects onto fishing lines and poles so that the game can take place over a larger area without the cat seeing them do it! Furry, feathery or flapping things are particularly attractive to cats, but with kittens especially, replace such toys as they start to get damaged in case parts get swallowed. Patches of bright light, such as the reflection from a watch face or mirror, often get cats chasing.

Rabbits

Rabbits can be good pets and nowadays are the third most widely kept small animal and increasing in popularity.

Diet

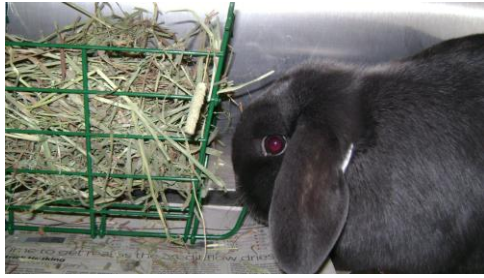
For a long time, most rabbits have been fed on commercially available dried mixes



<< commercial rabbit food >>

but this can lead to problems with teeth, upset stomachs and obesity as these diets tend to be high in protein, fat and energy and low in fibre. Overweight rabbits can suffer from arthritis, skin infection and poo matted around their tail as they are unable to clean themselves. In the wild, rabbits are grazers and will spend the majority of their day eating grass, leaves and plant shoots. How many overweight wild rabbits do you see when you are

driving around? This continual feeding and chewing also allows the rabbits teeth to grind down and stay healthy as rabbits teeth grow at an unbelievable 1.5 cm per month! Prevention is much better than cure and a good diet cannot be underestimated.



<< rabbit with hay manger >>

A balanced diet for a rabbit should consist of:-

Good quality grass hay e.g. Timothy Hay. Feed ad lib from racks or nets to increase time spent feeding.

A small amount of commercial diet. Avoid feeding commercial rabbit mixes consisting of pulses, grains, grass pellets and biscuits ad lib as this leads to selective feeding and obesity.

Rabbits also love greens and herbs particularly parsley and coriander.

And Finally

So that deals with the chubby pets, but what about the empty bank accounts. Animals need routine care all year round and as a way of spreading the cost of this the Blake Veterinary Group has introduced a Pet Health Plan. The Plan allows you to pay a monthly amount by direct debit to cover your pets routine treatment for the whole year i.e. vaccinations, flea treatment and worming products. There are also added benefits of joining the plan as you can receive discounts on food, microchipping, out of hours call outs and neutering. Also, as an added incentive to our clients on the Pet Health Plan we have held the pre VAT price rise prices until April 2010, in effect giving an extra 2.5% discount on your pet's routine treatment. For further information on joining the plan contact the receptionists at your usual surgery.

As a final point to note, the Pet Health Plan is not a health insurance policy for medical treatment and as I have mentioned in previous articles pets should have pet insurance to cover those situations when unexpected veterinary treatment is needed.

So, all that remains is for me to wish all the readers and all clients of the Blake Veterinary Group a Happy New Year and hope that this year keeps you and your pets well.