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I thought I would give Jim another break from the article writing this month. Like all our vets here at Blake Veterinary Group we do a lot of work with the Cat Protection Charity, so I thought that I would cover a difficult topic on cat care. Should my cat wear a collar?

I grew up with the belief that collars were not good for cats as they could hang themselves with them. Therefore it came as a bit of a surprise to me that in more than 20 years as a vet I have neither, witnessed or heard of a cat actually hanging itself with its collar. Please correct me if you know differently.

However, we frequently see cats that have managed to get one or more of its legs trapped through its collar. If the collar is not quickly removed the consequences of the collar sawing away at the cat armpit can be very serious.

I should apologise now for some of the graphic pictures that go with this article but it is difficult to explain exactly why we recommend that cats do not wear a collar without using the pictures to demonstrate the effects. I have used some photographs of the surgery that one poor cat had to undergo as a result of a collar injury. Have a look at this horrific sore on Ellie, a recent CP rescue cat.



Ellie was one of the most recent stray cats that have come into the care of Cats Protection. Although when Ellie was picked up she no longer had the collar on she did have a large smelly wound where one of her legs had been caught through her collar. These wounds can heal naturally but they will take a long time to do so.

First Ellie had to be sedated and blood samples taken so they could be analysed in our in house lab to make sure that there were no other issues we should be aware of. Then Ellie was prepped for surgery by Gwen Raeburn, one of our qualified nurses. This means that Ellie was put under a general anaesthetic and the area around the wound was clipped back to the skin so that it could be thoroughly cleaned and sterilised. When this was complete I could have a proper look at the wound in its entirety and work out how best to salvage the situation.

As you can see below in the next photograph the wound looks much bigger and more extensive than in the earlier photograph. This is firstly because of the angle of the picture, secondly because when Ellie's fur was clipped back it became apparent that the wound was bigger than we first thought and finally I had to surgically debride (cut out) the dead and diseased skin and flesh that surrounded the wound. Then I had to prepare the healthy skin and tissue so that a flap of skin from the shoulder area could be grafted into place.



In order to create a skin graft of this type I took a rectangle of skin from the shoulder area but left it attached on one side, I gently undermined the skin making sure that the important blood vessels remained intact. It is important to do this for without good blood supply the skin graft itself will die. Then I rotated it round to cover the wound area. The area from which I have taken the graft was then stitched together. Happily with cats they have enough elasticity and loose skin to allow us to do this. The edges are then stitched together in the normal way and will heal reasonably easily in most cases.

In the next photograph you may be able to see or work out that the skin flap has now (as I said above) been rotated into Ellie's armpit and this photograph was taken when the process of stitching it in place has nearly been completed.



Finally the graft is secured in place. If you look in the photo below you can see the finished op. You may be wondering what the tube is that is coming out of the wound. This is a fluid drain. As a severe wound starts to heal the tissue starts to ooze serum (this is the watery part of blood). If this fluid is allowed to build up it will potentially

slow down the healing process and it increases the chance of infection. This drain is usually left in place for a couple of days or so depending on the amount of fluid the body is producing.



In Ellie's case it was in for 2 days and she was also fully mobile in this time too. Ellie's stitches came out after 10 days and she has made a full recovery. This operation would also not have been possible without the generosity of the Cat Protection. Keep an eye out for their fund raising events – I know that we will be hosting one soon at the practice and please support the important work they do.



Ellie was lucky, it could have been worse. Why not ditch the collar and have an identity chip placed in your pet by your vet instead.