

AUTUMN 2015

Autumn, arguably the best time of the year to be in the North East. Warm days, cooler nights and still a little daylight savings to share with our pets.

Chocolate Toxicity

With Easter approaching and the corresponding confectionary adorning supermarket shelves, many of us will be (over)indulging in chocolate at this time of year. Although a few Easter eggs might make a great treat for kids and the joy of an Easter egg hunt can be shared by family and friends, there is someone who shouldn't be included in these food frenzies... the dog.

Dogs, like people, enjoy sweet and fatty foods and many will happily devour chocolate if given the opportunity – intentional or otherwise. Cocoa products such as chocolate contain a variety of compounds that are toxic to dogs.

The most abundant and important of these are theobromine and caffeine, which are very closely related. When dogs ingest these compounds they are rapidly absorbed and can cause signs of toxicity until they are removed or metabolised and excreted from the body. The onset of these signs and how long they last will depend on how big is the dog, how much chocolate has been eaten and how much theobromine it contains.

The first of these points can easily be considered. Have you weighed your dog recently? It might be worth having a rough idea of your dog's weight, which you can measure at home, or drop by your vet. The next few points might be more difficult. If you are able to estimate the weight of an Easter egg, how much of a chocolate bar has been eaten, or you have a receipt that tells you how big it was, these could be important in determining if your gluttonous canine is at risk of toxicity. The type of chocolate also makes a big difference to the risk. In general, the darker the chocolate (higher cacao %), the greater the danger. So, for example, a 10kg Jack Russell Terrier might be poisoned after consuming half a block of milk chocolate, but the same dog would need to consume a only few squares of dark cooking chocolate to be poisoned.



Toxicity can cause life-threatening neurological signs and changes to the heart beat. The first indications you might have could include excessive drinking, vomiting, diarrhoea or anxiety and excitement. These signs can progress to more serious muscle tremors, panting and seizures. Dogs can die from the toxic effects due to heart or respiratory failure and hyperthermia. A better outcome is always more likely if your pet is seen by a vet early, before signs of toxicity develop or progress. This way the toxin can be removed before it has a chance to be absorbed.

So should the Easter bunny conceal chocolate eggs for children, beware that sniffing doggy noses may inquire. Remind kids that chocolate treats aren't good for dogs. And, if you are concerned that Fido found the baking cocoa you can give your vet a call at any time, including after normal business hours.

Dr Jacqueline Poldy, Warby Street Veterinary Hospital

Chocolate Toxicity	1
Pyometra in cats	2
Newsletter Subscription	
Wounds causing joint infection in horses	3
Zoonotic Diseases	4

Pyometra in Cats

Pyometra in cats

Pyometra is the accumulation of pus in the uterus due to bacterial infection. This condition is very common in older female undesexed dogs, but more rare in cats. However, it does occur in cats of various ages and can be a fatal disease.

When a cat comes into season they have multiple cycles until they are mated. As these cycles continue the hormones involved lead to swelling in the uterine lining to make ready for a fertilised embryo to be implanted. The cervix also remains open to allow sperm to pass and uterine contractions are inhibited to stop sperm and embryos being lost. This leads to the perfect conditions for bacterial infection to ascend from the vagina into the uterus.

Pyometra can be defined as open or closed depending on what happens with the cervix. In an open pyometra the cervix remains open and pus can be seen leaking from the vulva (however as cats are good groomers you may only notice them licking a lot to clean up). Although a bad situation this type of pyometra is not as quickly fatal a closed type where the cervix closes and traps large volumes of pus inside the uterus. In a closed pyometra the bacteria involved produce toxins that cause fever, lethargy and kidney damage. You may notice an inappetent cat that is drinking and urinating a lot. In severe cases the uterus can rupture leaking pus into the abdomen and causing septic peritonitis.

The best defence against pyometra developing is desexing. In breeding cats it is important to breed them early in their breeding season to avoid the prolonged exposure to high hormone levels that predispose to pyometra.

NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST

We produce a 4 page newsletter every season to keep our clients informed about the goings on at Warby St Veterinary Hospital and the Wangaratta Equine Hospital. We send the newsletter out with our statements each time it is printed, but also deliver it electronically by email. If you would like to receive the newsletter in your email inbox you can either email me your address at tim@warbyvet.com.au or fill out the slip below and return it to Warby St Vet Hospital or Wangaratta Equine Hospital in person or by snail mail.

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Wounds causing joint infections

Sometimes the smallest most innocuous looking wounds in horses can prove the most damaging and life threatening, specifically when they involve penetration of a joint and subsequent infection.

A wound over a synovial structure (eg joint or tendon sheath) should always be investigated earlier rather than later, as prompt instigation of treatment can make the world of difference. Treatment within the first 6hrs is ideal (while 'contamination' has occurred but not yet 'infection'), 24-48hrs certainly better than several days or longer where irreversible damage has taken place. Septic arthritis is a challenging and often expensive disease to treat.

An injury that penetrates a synovial structure has the potential to introduce bacteria into that joint or tendon sheath. Bacteria can be found on the skin itself or on the object eg stick or wire causing the injury. Synovial (joint) fluid is an excellent culture medium for bacteria, and infection can rapidly set in. Joint fluid can be analysed under a microscope and cultured to determine whether a joint is infected.

Warning signs that a joint may be involved include a lameness that suddenly becomes worse (sometimes even non weight bearing) 1-3 days after an injury, and obvious swelling of the joint and/or pain on flexion.

The position of a wound may arouse suspicion that it involves a joint, but the only way to tell for certain is to either visualise joint fluid leaking from the wound when the joint is flexed, examine a sample of joint fluid, or infuse saline (in an aseptic manner) into the joint and see whether it flows out the wound.



Inflammation and bacteria in a joint quite rapidly causes damage to articular cartilage, pain and joint effusion. Part of the inflammatory process called fibrin can form quite large 'chunks' and hide pockets of bacteria from the effect of antibiotics.

Treatment involves lavage ('flushing out') the joint with large amounts of sterile saline and infusing antibiotics. Sometimes this can be done standing under sedation, but may require a general anaesthetic.

Generally antibiotics given into the muscle or orally do not achieve high enough concentrations in the joint to treat the infection. They need to be given as an intravenous regional perfusion locally or occasionally antibiotic impregnated beads need to be placed in the joint itself where they release the antibiotic slowly. Arthroscopy may be required to fully evaluate and treat a septic joint.

Flushing a joint with a fresh wound and starting appropriate antibiotics has the best outcome for the future athletic performance of the horse, rather than trying to treat an already infected joint. It is also much cheaper to treat early and well rather than once infection has set in. Early assessment by a Veterinarian is essential. Disinfectant can be applied to the wound and it bandaged to keep contaminants out before the Veterinarian arrives, please avoid exploring wounds near joints with fingers in case there is communication - we don't want dirty fingers in joints!

Zoonoses—diseases transmissible from animals

Pets and Your Health

We all love our pets, often considering them part of the family. The closeness of this ‘human animal bond’ means we enjoy having close contact with our pets in the form of affection, play time and sharing our homes with them. It has been scientifically proven that these relationships greatly improve our mental and physical health. Did you know though, your pet could play a role in transmitting disease to you or your family?



That’s right, unfortunately many of the parasitic, bacterial and fungal infections that we see in our pets can also affect humans. We call these conditions zoonotic diseases. Luckily though in most cases the severity and risk of contracting such diseases is low and easily avoided. Those people most at risk are young children, the elderly, pregnant women and immune compromised individuals. Disease transmission from animals to humans mostly occurs through contact with animal faeces or other body products, bites/scratches and lapses in personal hygiene. Below are some important steps to remember to protect you and your family from disease.

Always wash hands with warm soapy water after handling pets – especially before preparing or eating food

Supervise young children with pets – make sure little hands that have touched pets aren’t placed in the mouth

Maintain regular animal health treatments – monthly flea/mite products and worming every 3 months

Regularly remove animal wastes from the house/backyard – don’t accumulate possible sources of infection

Pregnant and immune compromised people should avoid handling faeces and other animal wastes

Quickly wash and disinfect bite and scratch wounds – see a doctor if you are concerned

Seek veterinary advice whenever your pet appears unwell – for their health and yours



The benefits of the wonderful relationships we share with our pets far outweigh the risk of zoonotic disease. In most cases the severity and risk of disease are low and can be easily avoided. If you are concerned or would just like more information then ask your veterinarian next time you’re in.

George Watson (final year veterinary student, Charles Sturt University)