

Geriatric Concerns In Our Pets

What do we mean by geriatric? Well, it has long been accepted that a dog or cat who is over the age of 8 years is considered to be geriatric. There are more and more geriatric pets these days; due to, the significant improvements in health care for our pets and the elevated status that most of our pets enjoy in their families. So, what are our biggest concerns with our elderly friends?

Arthritis is one of the top concerns that leads to our geriatric friends slowing down, becoming stiffer in their ability to move or less likely to be as playful. Dogs, cats, ferrets and birds can all develop arthritis. Dog owners have quite a few options of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS) to choose from to help their friends with their pain. A quick list of the most commonly used NSAIDS available are Rimadyl, Etogesic, Zubrin, Metacam, and even aspirin. However, cats and other commonly owned exotics do not have the same options as our canine friends, but we do have treatment options for them. Controlling pain from inflammation associated with arthritis can help get the spring back in your pet's stride.



Hearing loss is another very common problem that occurs with geriatric patients, just as we see with elderly humans. Unfortunately, pets do not have the option of using a hearing aid like humans. We do have the option to train our pet to respond to a variety of tools that can aid in communication. A laser pointer can be used to train a pet to respond to and follow the light when flashed in front of them. Paging collars are also available to assist owners of pets with hearing loss and get their pet's attention. Hand signals incorporated with training from a young age is ideal. When the ears lose their ability to hear as well, the animal can still recognize the hand signals an owner utilizes to communicate with them. Early use of alternate forms of training, prior to hearing loss, will help to reduce both an owner's and pet's anxiety as the pet's hearing is lost.

What do we do with a pet that is losing its eyesight? Well, that will depend on what is causing its sight to diminish. There are cataracts, glaucoma, high blood pressure and SARDs (Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration) to name a few of the most common causes of sight loss in pets. Surgery and medications are available to help with many of the reasons for sight loss, just as we see in human medicine. Ophthalmologists (eye specialists) are available for referral from your veterinarian (keep in mind that particular surgical procedures can be very costly, but well worth the expense). As a pet loses its eye sight keeping the environment the same is also very important to allow a pet to feel more comfortable in its environment and to help it continue to successfully navigate through its home and yard (for a dog). Owners will notice that just as in humans, the other senses become more acute to allow the pet to navigate its world more successfully.

Dental disease becomes more common with age. The importance of good dental health is a necessity.

Keeping geriatric pets free of tartar and periodontal disease helps them to continue eating and maintaining their appropriate level of nutrition and also comfort. Maintenance of good dental health in our pets (as in ourselves) helps to reduce a source of discomfort and infection. If your pet has normal dental health, keeping their mouth healthy and normal can easily be done at home by using toothbrushes and toothpastes that are safe to use in animals; as well as special rinses and chews. Keep in mind that human toothpastes are NOT safe to use in pets due to the higher levels of fluoride. Please remember that if your pet's breath smells bad or you can visibly see dental calculus (the brown/yellow hard material on teeth) then your pet's mouth needs to be evaluated by your veterinarian. Your veterinarian can advise you on the proper dental hygiene for your pet. This may include a recommendation for a thorough dental cleaning, polishing, and fluoride treatment.

Lastly, major organ failure is another big concern for owners with elderly pets. There are many options for treatment for pets with heart failure, kidney failure, and liver failure. Specialized care can include pacemakers, synthetic valves, and kidney transplants all similar to what is seen in human medicine. Medications have also been developed to help with many of the symptoms associated with organ failure and can even help increase the functioning of those organs. Special diets are also available that are specific for particular organ failure as they progress or help to slow the progression of the failure. Organ failure can often be controlled, but the key to successful management is early detection. Biannual comprehensive physical exams that include complete bloodwork can help in the early detection of chemical changes associated with organs failing. This can be quite valuable in treating a geriatric pet and allow for a longer life with their loving owner.

Veterinary medicine offers the geriatric patient's owner more options to help ease the aging process. By working closely with your veterinarian from the time you acquire a pet, can help an owner to identify subtle changes in their pet before it is too late to help them. Remember, old age is not a disease, but a process. By taking an active role in your pet's overall healthcare you can directly aide your pet to live a long, healthy and active life.

Sandra M. Grant, DVM
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24 Million Settlement Reached in Pet Food Recall Case

Canada-based Menu Foods and other companies that were involved in last year's massive recall of pet foods have agreed to pay a combined \$24 million to pet owners.

The settlement, which was outlined in papers filed Thursday in U.S. District Court in Camden, N.J., still needs court approval. A hearing was scheduled for May 30.

Under the settlement, the companies will pay all of the pet owners' documented expenses for the injury and death of their pets as a result of consuming the recalled products, Reuters reported.

The recalls were first announced in March 2007 after dogs and cats became ill or died as a result of eating the tainted food. The contaminants were discovered to be melamine and cyanuric acid, which were in ingredients from China that went into pet food in the United States.

Source: Veterinary Practice News

The Cat Flea

The **cat flea**, *Ctenocephalides felis* is the most important flea in much of the U.S. as it can reproduce on both dogs and cats and occasionally bites humans in proximity to these pets.

This time of the year (late spring early summer) is when pregnant dogs and cats give birth to their young. The biology of the flea was researched by the famous international house of bankers and entomologists, the Rothschild's. The adult female flea senses the buildup of pregnancy hormones in the host female.

The flea synchronizes her own reproduction to that of the host mammal. **Fleas eggs** are laid around the area where the mammal rests and especially where the mother mammal prepares to birth her offspring. **Flea larvae** resemble fly larvae and are white and worm like. The flea larvae feed on feces shed by adult fleas after feeding on host blood.

Flea larvae pupariate in silky cocoons in the substrate where they passed through their larval stages. So, young adult fleas emerge just prior to the birth of kittens or puppies in the cat flea. Large numbers of blood hungry fleas can greatly reduce the health and vigor of mother cats and dogs, and are especially hard on neonatal kittens who have insufficient nutrition.

Management can involve removing adult fleas from the immediate environment of the cats and dogs. Fortunately, we have also modern pesticides that include **growth regulators** that can be applied to the pets and the adult fleas are killed by feeding on pet blood. Also, the feces of intoxicated fleas can kill their larvae resulting pretty complete **control**.

A popular TV Ad shows a product available for dogs. Cats can be sensitive to chemicals that are for dogs.

Good News!

There is a similar product for cats and neonatal kittens that most vets and animal shelters have, and also at pet stores.

Be sure to ask for the cat product when dealing with cat fleas on cats! And do not waste time because cat fleas can transmit a **protozoan blood parasite** that is similar in effect to malaria in humans.

<http://entomology.wsu.edu/insectoftheweek/CatFlea.html>

Pet Ownership

Among couples without children, pet ownership is still highest among young couples—those whose household head is younger than 45. Nevertheless, pet ownership among couples without children in the household has risen recently among working and retired older couples but not among young couples.

Overall, 59.8 percent of couples own a pet or pets, while pet ownership remains highest among parents and lowest among singles. About 70.5 percent of households with children owned a pet or pets at the end of 2006, in comparison with 42.1 percent of single-person households.

Source: 2007 edition of the AVMA's U.S. Pet Ownership & Demographic Sourcebook

Cat Scratch Disease (*Bartonella henselae* Infection)

What is cat scratch disease?

Cat scratch disease (CSD) is a bacterial disease caused by *Bartonella henselae*. Most people with CSD have been bitten or scratched by a cat and developed a mild infection at the point of injury. Classically, cats transmit the organism when they are parasitized by fleas, scratch themselves, and get infected flea dirt (digested host's blood excreted by fleas) in their claws, and scratch a person (or another cat) with their dirty claws. Cats can also harbor *Bartonella* in their mouths and transmit the infection via bites or groom their feet and self-infect their claws.

Infection with *Bartonella henselae* in the immunocompetent person leads to "cat scratch disease." The inoculation site (a bite or scratch) develops a small red bump (a "papule.") About 2-3 weeks following contact with the infected cat, the lymph node in the area of the contact will swell and become painful and a fever develops. These signs generally resolve on their own and the condition is minor.

If the patient does not have a competent immune system, one of several much more serious syndromes can result. The infection goes deeper into the body causing spleen enlargement, and potentially encephalitis, heart valve infection, and other conditions. These syndromes may be observed rarely in people who are immunocompetent.

How likely is it for a cat to be infected?

Since fleas carry the bacteria, cats with insufficient flea control are at highest risk. This means cats living in climates that are warm and humid (conditions fleas thrive best in) are most likely to be infected. If conditions are right, up to 40% of cats in an area may be infected. If a person is diagnosed with cat scratch disease, there is a 90% chance that the cats they own will be found infected as well.

Do infected cats get sick?

This is a highly controversial question as there is some evidence that *Bartonella henselae* infection may be one cause of the progressive oral disease of the cat called [Plasma Cell Stomatitis](#). It has been suggested that *Bartonella* infection may be a the root of numerous chronic inflammatory conditions of the cat. With such high numbers of infected cats present regionally (up to 40%), it is going to be difficult to prove one way or the other whether there is a real association or just coincidence.

Many cats with Plasma Cell Stomatitis test strongly positive for *Bartonella henselae* but this may simply reflect a high incidence of exposure in the community. These cats often show tremendous improvement in their oral disease with antibiotics focussed on eradication of *Bartonella*; however, since secondary infections are common with Plasma Cell Stomatitis, antibiotic response is common. The jury is still out and the controversy rages on, but there is certainly nothing harmful in treating a cat with Plasma Cell Stomatitis for *Bartonella*, though the medication (azithromycin) is somewhat expensive.

Other than this controversy over chronic illnesses, if there are symptoms of infection they are mild, transient, and similar to those of humans: fever, swollen lymph nodes, muscle pain.

Can dogs get infected?

The short answer is: yes. Fleas may carry the infection as they do for cats plus it appears that ticks may also be carriers. As with cats, dogs are not believed to get sick from this infection except for the minor flu-like symptoms described above.

How can I reduce my risk of getting cat scratch disease from my cat?

- Avoid "rough play" with cats, especially kittens. This includes any activity that may lead to cat scratches and bites.
- Wash cat bites and scratches immediately and thoroughly with running water and soap.
- Do not allow cats to lick open wounds that you may have.
- Control fleas.
- If you develop an infection (with pus and pronounced swelling) where you were scratched or bitten by a cat or develop symptoms, including fever, headache, swollen lymph nodes, and fatigue, contact your physician.

References for more information about cat scratch disease:

CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/HEALTHYPETS/diseases/catscratch.htm>

Winn Feline Foundation: <http://www.winnfelinehealth.org/health/csd.html>

Marvista Vet: <http://www.marvistavet.com/html/bartonella.html>

Noted from AVMA: Legislative watch program debuts

The AVMA recently launched Vocus, an online legislative watch and public relations program, to help members of the AVMA Congressional Action Network monitor legislation and work with their local legislators. The goal of AVMA-CAN is to create a network of politically active member veterinarians in every legislative district across the country. The network of members keeps their senators and representatives up to date on AVMA policies, background information, and educational tools. Vocus will help keep AVMA-CAN members connected. *JAVMA, June 1, 2008*

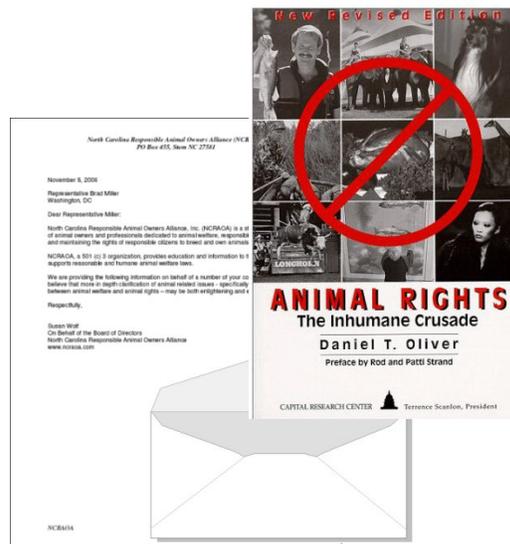
New on NCRAOA Website:

EDUCATE YOUR LEGISLATOR CAMPAIGN

Send a copy of Daniel Oliver's book, "Animal Rights: The Inhumane Crusade" to your legislator!

The book is a definitive expose of the animal rights movement, leaders, and the organizations that will stop at nothing to eliminate the human use of animals for clothing, food, entertainment, and research. **About the Author.** Daniel Oliver is a research associate at the prestigious Capital Research Center in Washington, D.C. where he edits the monthly newsletter *Alternatives in Philanthropy*.

With one click and a small donation, NCRAOA will mail the book, including a standard letter, to the legislator of your choice.



Canine Heat Stroke

Heat stroke occurs when the dog's ability to regulate its body temperature is lost. A dog regulates body temperature primarily through respiration. When the respiratory tract cannot evacuate heat quickly enough, the body temperature rises. Normal body temperature is less than 103F, but once the temperature goes over 105F a number of physiologic events can occur that make it even more difficult for the animal to regain control of its temperature. At this time, oxygen delivery to the system cannot keep up with rapidly elevating demand. If the temperature exceeds 108F, cellular damage starts to occur in a number of organ systems including the kidneys, liver, gastrointestinal tract, heart and brain. This can be a life-threatening situation, but for those animals that survive there is the possibility of long term problems after the occurrence.

Symptoms

- Rapid, frantic panting
- Thick saliva
- Bright red tongue
- muddy pink color of gums
- Vomiting
- Staggering
- Diarrhea
- Loss of consciousness

Heat stroke is an emergency that requires veterinary assistance, but you can effectively initiate treatment in most cases before heading for the veterinary hospital. You must aggressively assist the dog's efforts to lower body temperature with the use of water and air.

Treatment

- Move the dog to a cool place
- Wet the dog or immerse in cool (not cold) water
- Fan the dog
- Take the dog to the veterinarian for intravenous fluids and further treatment
- Do NOT place the wet dog in an enclosed crate
- Do NOT cover the wet dog with a blanket
- Do NOT apply ice as this constricts blood vessels

Prevention

- Never leave the dog in a closed car; heat inside a parked car can build up to as much as 40 degrees above outside temperature.
- Make sure outside dogs have access to shade, ventilation and water. Make sure water containers are stationary and large enough to supply water throughout the day.
- Be aware that dogs perspire only through their tongues and pads of their feet and the combination of energetic activity with hot, humid temperatures can be dangerous. Dogs can get so enthusiastic that they run and play without concern, so it is up to the owner to stop the activity before there is heatstroke.



Does Fido Really Need that Vaccine?

Ashley Mitek, Information Specialist, University of Illinois, College of Veterinary Medicine

Getting a shot at the doctor's office isn't much fun, and it isn't easy to watch your furry family member get one either--especially when it might be in its derriere. But in a world where even parents of young children are refusing to vaccinate their kids because they feel the risks outweigh the benefits, now some pet owners are posing similar questions to their veterinarian.

Dr. Arnon Gal is a small animal medicine resident at the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Urbana. He says that, "vaccines are broken down into three categories: core, noncore, and then those that are not recommended due to lack of efficacy or fear of harming the animal."

And just who decides what vaccines are core and noncore? That responsibility rests in the hands of the Canine Vaccine Task Force. They meet each year to review research and data from all over the country to develop the best vaccination protocol.

A core vaccine means that it has been decided that this shot is very important to the health of your dog, and that if the animal is not vaccinated, there is a good chance it will become seriously ill. Dr. Gal mentions that the core vaccines are, "Parvovirus, distemper, adenovirus, and, of course, rabies which is required by law." The first three items on the list are usually combined into one vaccine so the animal does not have to receive four different shots at one time--ouch!

In many cases, these vaccines will last three years. However, your veterinarian may recommend a different schedule for one reason or another.

The second category of vaccines, called noncore "usually depend upon where the dog lives and whether or not it is in an endemic area," says Dr. Gal. He gives the example of an animal living in an area known to harbor leptospirosis, like Urbana, Ill. This bacteria is spread in urine and can be zoonotic; this means the other animal in your house, the one-year-old human kind crawling on the floor, can contract the disease as well.

The vaccine to this bacteria is given to most dogs in Urbana because veterinarians know that this area is endemic, or as Dr. Gal likes to say, "if your dog lives in 'lepto-land' you vaccinate for it, and if it doesn't you don't." Many of the noncore vaccines do not last as long as the core vaccines, so they may need to be boosted every six months to a year.

In short, there is no cookie-cutter recommendation for dog vaccines. Other than making sure your animal has received the core ones, it is up to your veterinarian to determine what additional shots should be given.

"Every vaccine has potential side effects," mentions Dr. Gal, but reports show the risk is quite small. According to newly-released data from Banfield, a chain of veterinary hospitals across the United States, after reviewing over one million dogs who had been given a vaccine, only a little over one-third of one percent had an adverse reaction.

Although it may be a hindrance to take time out of your busy day to drive the dog to the vet and keep them up to date on their vaccines, it would be much worse if you found out they had contracted a serious illness and may die, when it could have been avoided with one simple vaccine. For more information about vaccinating your dog, contact your local veterinarian. <http://www.cvm.uiuc.edu/petcolumns/index.cfm?function=showarticle&id=570>

Orange County Tethering Ordinance Delayed

More than 60 people signed up to speak in a packed, standing room only crowd for the June 3 public hearing. Changes to the existing ordinance which would limit the time a dog is allowed to be tethered and set minimum sizes for pens are being opposed by the Eno River Coon Hunters Association, NC Sporting Dog Association, Responsible Dog Owners of the Eastern States, NCRAOA, and countless sportsmen, hunters, and dog owners in Orange and surrounding counties.

Tethering can be the safest method of controlling a hard to contain animal. There are dogs that can escape from anything. They can chew through fencing and even chain link, break out windows, open doors, climb or dig under fences, and destroy wire and plastic shipping crates in seconds. These dogs can only be contained securely (and humanely) with a well thought out tether system.

An estimate of the county's dog population would be approximately 30,000 owned dogs. Chained and abused dogs which are the stated reason for the anti-tethering ordinance cannot possibly be in the majority of this number. The unchain your dog coalition replaced tethers with fencing for 85 chained dogs which translates to 2/10 of a percent of the county dog population. Placing unreasonable restrictions and burdens on those who responsibly tether in order to address the failure to be responsible of less than one percent of the dog owning population is not sound lawmaking.

The same can be said for the specification of minimum allowable sizes for penning a dog. The minimum allowed size for a dog up to 35 pounds would be 8X10 for each dog. If you want to keep 2 dogs in a pen the size must be increased by 50%. Sizes increase incrementally per the dog's weight. NCRAOA believes that setting size restrictions is completely arbitrary. There are no studies that show how much room a dog needs to be comfortable. Since dogs are pack animals descended from wolves certainly multiple dogs can be penned together. The 8X10 size makes at least one nationally marketed kennel, American Kennel Club Pro Breeder kennel, illegal in Orange County. Additionally, setting these limits ignores the fact that needs are entirely different between the single dog owner and the multiple dog owner who kennels up to 20 or 30 dogs.

The ordinance revision is fanatically supported by Tethering Committee member, Suzanne Roy – director for the California based animal rights organization In Defense of Animals (IDA). IDA is best known for the “Guardian Campaign” which replaces the use of “owner” with the word “guardian”. In brief, a change to guardian would alter property status of an animal. Ms. Roy, who also opposes animal testing, has direct ties to Physicians for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) a front group for the radical animal rights group PETA.

It is a sad day in Orange County (or anywhere) when radical philosophy is given credence over the information and views provided by the hunters and dog owners who truly understand animal husbandry and animal welfare. ■

Protecting your right to responsibly own and breed animals.

Join NCRAOA. See our home page for membership information and application

For more information on animal health, training, reports on pet issues, animal sheltering, or to learn the difference between animal welfare and animal rights – visit our website at www.ncraoa.com

North Carolina Responsible Animal Owners Alliance, Inc. (NCRAOA) is a statewide organization of animal owners and professionals dedicated to animal welfare, responsible animal ownership, and maintaining the rights of responsible citizens to breed and own animals. NCRAOA, a 501(c)3 organization, provides education and information to the public and supports reasonable and humane animal welfare laws.

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