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Lyme Disease: Fact or Fiction?

Lyme infection is a common problem in Connecticut. At CAH we diagnose it at least once per week. Ongoing research provides us with new information about the disease and its prevention, but many myths still exist among pet owners. **Do you know your Lyme facts from fiction?** (The following is reprinted with permission from NAVC *Clinician's Brief VeTeam Advisor*, April 2008.)

Dogs do not get the typical "bull's eye" rash seen in people infected with Lyme.

Fact. There is no known "acute" phase of Lyme disease known to occur in dogs. It generally takes at least 60 days for clinical signs to develop, and these signs usually include: lameness; swollen, painful joints; fever; and/or loss of appetite.

All dogs that are infected with Lyme will develop clinical signs of disease.

Fiction. Of the dogs that are infected with Lyme, it is estimated that 90% to 95% will either remain asymptomatic, or will develop signs that are so subtle, they may go unnoticed by owners.

A tick must feed for at least 50 hours before it can transmit *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.

Fact. Ticks must feed for at least 50 hours before transmitting the bacteria. Likelihood of infection peaks 48 to 52 hours after attachment, so prompt tick removal is important in helping to prevent Lyme infection.

Dogs only develop signs of Lyme disease during the tick season.

Fiction. While the disease is transmitted by ticks during the tick season, signs can take up to 6 months to develop; so, they can essentially occur anytime during the year.

Human Lyme infections have been reported in all 50 of the United States.

Fact. While most cases of human Lyme infection are still concentrated in the Northeast, mid-Atlantic, and upper midwestern regions, there have been reports of the infection in all 50 states.

If a dog has had Lyme disease in the past, it will remain protected from reinfection for life.

Fiction. Dogs are not thought to develop natural immunity to Lyme once infected. New infections can probably still occur if the dog continues to be exposed to ticks that carry the bacteria.

All ticks carry Lyme disease.

Fiction. Only Ixodes ticks (such as the deer tick) are known to transmit Lyme disease to dogs, and only those Ixodes ticks that have been previously infected through a reservoir host (a small rodent or bird) will carry the bacterium that causes Lyme.

Vaccination is an effective and safe method of helping to prevent Lyme disease.

Fact. Annual vaccination against Lyme disease has been shown to be both safe and effective. Combined with tick control, vaccination can be an important part of Lyme prevention.

An infected dog can be treated with antibiotics to successfully clear a Lyme infection.

Fiction. While it is true that Lyme-infected dogs can be treated with antibiotics and this will help rid them of clinical signs, research suggests that dogs may not clear the organism from their bodies completely and can remain chronically infected.

Preventing Lyme disease is better than treating it.

Fact. Once infected, there are many risks for dogs, including some life-threatening forms of the disease. Because chronic infection may occur even with treatment, preventing a dog from becoming infected in the first place is definitely the best way to fight Lyme.



Old Friends

Her muzzle is graying, she's sleeping more and has a bit less enthusiasm for play. Many of us with older pets are watching these signs slowly increase as our pets age more quickly than us. The signs are worth noting, no matter how subtle or infrequent. Your observations can help your veterinarian reach an early diagnosis and treat your pet appropriately if there is indeed an underlying ailment. Some of the things to watch for include:

- Behavior changes, such as irritability or an unwillingness to play
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Change in eating or drinking habits: increased water consumption, significant increase in appetite, or a decreased appetite or unwillingness to eat dry food
- Bad breath, drooling
- Increased urination, change in housebreaking habits, difficulty passing stool or urine, blood in the stool or urine, vomiting or diarrhea lasting more than a day
- Lameness lasting more than a few days, or lameness in multiple limbs, problems climbing stairs or getting in a vehicle
- A change in coat, especially dryness or brittle coat, hair loss and excessive scratching, any open sore that doesn't heal within a week
- Lumps
- Excessive panting, especially while at rest
- Weakness or sudden collapse
- Apparent hearing or vision loss

Pay close attention to your dog's behavior and movements as she ages, and share your observations with your veterinarian. Consider geriatric laboratory panels, and twice yearly exams as well. Your diligence and care can help her live a happier and healthier life as a geriatric citizen.

Senior Wellness



Pets are now living longer, thanks to increased owner awareness and advances in veterinary medicine. A number of ailments may accompany old age, so senior veterinary wellness exams are one of the most important things you can do to help keep your older pet healthy.

The onset of old age in dogs varies by size; some giant breeds are considered senior at six years old, but smaller breeds and cats don't

earn that distinction until age ten or later. As your pet ages, her heart, lungs, kidneys and liver may all become less efficient and more prone to disease. Many ailments have a gradual onset, and some may not become symptomatic until they are in an advanced stage. For example, kidney disease can be fatal, but you might not notice symptoms until as much as 70% of kidney function has been lost. Fortunately, many diseases can be detected with blood work long before they become debilitating, and early enough to be successfully treated.

Arthritis is one of the most common causes of chronic pain in dogs, but other conditions, such as hip dysplasia, can cause pain and restrict your dog's mobility as she ages. There are a number of treatment options that can help keep her comfortable, including joint supplements, non-steroidal anti-inflammatories and surgery.

Hearing and vision changes are common with age, as are changes in taste, touch and smell. Dogs can suffer from cognitive disorders that may result in confusion or other behavior changes. Some of these problems should not be considered "normal aging" and can be successfully treated by your veterinarian.

Dental disease is very common in older pets and can lead to pain, tooth loss and the spread of bacteria, which can cause damage to the heart, lungs and kidneys. Regular preventive care is the best approach to this problem.

Studies show the life expectancy of healthy weight dogs is often two years longer than that of overweight dogs. Obesity will exacerbate mobility problems, and will put your dog at greater risk for cardiac disease, respiratory problems, immunological diseases and more. As your pet ages, her nutritional needs change.

Although you may have to adjust your routines as your pet ages, she still needs plenty of exercise and mental stimulation to stay happy and healthy. With a little extra attention, you and your veterinarian can help your beloved friend age gracefully and enjoy her golden years.

"I am in favor of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being."

– Abraham Lincoln



As they age, almost all dogs will develop Nuclear Sclerosis, a hardening of the lens in their eyes. This causes a grayish-blue appearance, and typically does not interfere with vision. This condition is often mistaken for cataracts, but your veterinarian can distinguish between the two.

Trichobezoar

What on earth is a trichobezoar? Well, a bezoar is a mass of indigestible material found in the stomach or intestines of animals, including humans. They can be classified according to their primary constituent, such as phytobezoar (plant material) or trichobezoar (hair). Thus, a trichobezoar is a hairball! Hundreds of years ago, bezoars from animals such as goats were believed to be antidotes for poison, and to even have magical properties.

Nowadays, hairballs aren't so glamorous; nevertheless, if you are a cat owner, they're worth knowing about. Despite the name, hairballs are rarely round. They're typically cylindrical in shape and about an inch long, although they can be much longer. The irony of the unpleasant presents your cat may leave are that they're the result of his fastidious habit of self-grooming.

As a cat grooms, dead hair is ingested. Most passes through the digestive tract intact, but some remains in the stomach and gradually becomes an irritant, triggering the vomit response. This is completely normal and not harmful. Long-haired cats are more prone to hairballs than short-haired, and older, more experienced groomers may produce more than young cats.

Hairballs can occasionally lead to severe medical problems. If a hairball passes into the intestines, a blockage could occur that can become life-threatening. Signs of a problem include loss of appetite, unproductive retching, inability to defecate, diarrhea or a swollen abdomen. If you suspect your cat may have an impaction, see your veterinarian immediately.

You can minimize the risk of hairballs by regularly grooming your cat. If that is really difficult, consider taking him to a professional groomer. There are a number of hairball remedies available that most cats enjoy eating. Some specialty cat foods contain high-fiber and other nutrients that might help with chronic hairball problems. Talk to your veterinarian about the best course of action if your cat has a chronic hairball problem.



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"I found an Arts and Crafts site that shows how to turn hairballs into cherished gifts for the whole family!"

Presidential Pets

"If you want a friend in Washington," said President Harry S. Truman, "get a dog." George Washington started the long tradition of presidents keeping pets in the White House. His wife had a parrot named Polly, and he kept many hounds and horses. In fact, most of the presidents had pets, and some were



With White House Press Secretary traveling with the President, Barney holds his first Press Briefing. *White House photo by Alex Cooney*

rather unusual. James Buchanan kept a herd of elephants and a pair of bald eagles, and John Quincy Adams had an alligator that was given to him by the Marquis de Lafayette. Other pets have ranged from silk worms and mice to lions, tigers and bears!

Many of the presidents and first ladies are said to have been extremely fond of their pets. First Lady Grace Coolidge included her beloved white collie "Rob Roy" in her official portrait, which now hangs in the China Room at the White House. President Warren Harding's dog "Laddie Boy" sat in his own hand-carved chair at Cabinet meetings. Millard Fillmore, who served as president from 1850-1853, was one of the few presidents not known to have any pets at the White House, yet he is credited with being the founding member and president of the Buffalo chapter of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.



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Fleas and ticks are at their worst in the fall. Ticks re-emerge even on warm winter days and fleas love a warm house all year long. So don't forget your Frontline or Advantage treatments until the ground is frozen solid.



The nursing staff at CAH truly cares about your pets!
 Front Row, Left to Right - Faun, Tabetha, Kate
 Back Row, Left to Right - Deb, Nicole, Kathryn, Diane

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