

## We are now an RCVS accredited hospital

You will now see the RCVS Accredited Practice logo displayed proudly in our practice, this is what it means:

The RCVS Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) is a voluntary initiative to accredit veterinary practices in the UK.

Through setting standards and carrying out regular assessments, the Scheme aims to promote and maintain the highest standards of veterinary care.

It offers peace of mind to you, as we will volunteer for rigorous assessment every four years and will ensure we meet the high standards required including hygiene, 24-hour emergency cover, staff training, certain types of equipment and cost estimation procedures.



**High standards of care for animals and peace of mind for animal owners.**

### Topics in this issue:

- *Avoiding Christmas Calamities!*
- *Fleas?! But it's freezing!*
- *Guinea pigs are great!*
- *Winter aches and pains*
- *Winter Worms!*

## Avoiding Christmas calamities!

The festive season is an exciting time, with plenty of lovely food, chocolate galore, presents, visitors, not to mention all the decorations and the tree! So here are some tips to keep your pets out of trouble over this fun time.

**Festive food alert!** With so much extra food in the house it is essential to keep it well away from pets. **Rich foods** can lead to upset tummies, but be especially aware of **raisins** in puddings, pies and cakes, since they can be very toxic to the kidneys. **Chocolate** is another festive favourite, but as little as 50g of plain chocolate can be fatal in small dogs. Turkey meat is fine but if your pets get hold of **turkey bones**, there is the potential for dangerous gut blockages. Also, don't forget about the **presents** under the tree! Dogs, with their sensitive noses will be able to tell exactly which gifts are edible and the wrappings and ribbons won't do their tummies any good either!

**Visitor alert!** Christmas is a time for families and our homes are often full of visitors celebrating the festive cheer. Many pets will revel in this extra attention but some will find it extremely stressful. If your animals are more shy than sociable, make sure they have a safe space they can retreat to undisturbed.



**Winter walks:** when going for an after lunch walk, take care of your dog's paws. Snow and ice can ball up between the toes, especially on furry feet, and road grit can cause nasty sores if it is not washed off once you are home. Also slim fine coated breeds such as whippets find it hard to conserve heat and will benefit from a dog coat in cold weather.

**Pinch an inch!** With many pets spending more time indoors during the winter months – they are getting less exercise and need correspondingly less food. Keep an eye out for any weight gain since excess weight can cause a range of health problems including heart disease and diabetes.

If you would like any further information on any of the topics mentioned in this article, please speak to a member of our team. Have fun with your pets and stay safe over the festive season!

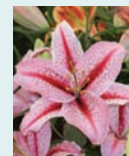


### Dastardly Decorations!

Make sure the decorations and the tree are either well out of reach or securely fastened down. Cats especially, find the twinkly lights, tinsel and baubles irresistible and will love to bat them about or, worse, chew on them. Which not only could ruin your lovely decorations but could cause them harm if they are accidentally swallowed or broken.

### Toxic plant alert!

When cats are not going out as much they also like to amuse themselves by chewing house plants. Beware of **lilies** which are toxic to cats. All parts of the plant, including the pollen, are toxic, causing kidney failure.



### E-Cigarette awareness

These are a new hazard for dogs that chew everything. The high concentration of nicotine poses a very serious risk to chewing pets.

Cat with wool, rabbit, dog in snow: Jane Burton



## Fleas?! But it's freezing!

It's true! The winter months are often the worst for fleas because although it is cold outside, our houses are warm and just right for them to breed in their thousands. This is why it is important to continue with flea protection at this time of year because just one or two fleas can easily turn into an infestation. In many cases new flea problems are caused by flea eggs from *old* infestations hatching out and reinfesting your pets!

Common symptoms of bites include itchiness, red rashes, hair loss and severe irritation, which is particularly marked in pets with an allergy to flea saliva. Some affected pets develop secondary skin infections and may require antibiotics and treatment to relieve their itching.

Have a chat to our lovely staff about how to protect both your pets and your house from fleas in winter! For optimum flea control, treatment should ideally be all year round!

## Guinea pigs are great!



Guinea pigs make lovely pets! They are easy to handle, very sociable and, provided they are well cared for, tend to stay in good health. Here are some tips to keep them healthy:

Firstly, guinea pigs should always be kept in pairs or groups; they will become stressed and anxious if they are on their own. The best combination is a same sex pair or group.

Although it is common to keep guinea pigs with rabbits, the rabbit often ends up bullying the guinea pig and sometimes cause nasty injuries.

Next, they will need a nice place to live! Get a large hutch with separate sleeping and living compartments but as guinea pigs often find the slopes in the two-level kinds too steep, get them a bungalow, not a house! They will also need lots of space to run around. A secure run is ideal, especially if it is attached to the hutch so they can shelter from bad weather. Guinea pigs can live outdoors all year round but you need to ensure the hutch is well insulated.

A well balanced diet is vital. They should have a constant supply of good quality hay (to help wear down their teeth), about half a handful of fresh vegetables per pig every day and a small amount of food in pellet form. Fresh vegetables are essential as a source of vitamin C.

You also need to play with your guinea pig every day. Unlike rabbits, who can be very flighty, guinea pigs are usually happy to be held and the more often you do it, the more relaxed they will be. Also, handling them regularly will allow you to pick up quickly on any health issues they might have.

Although they are generally healthy, common problems to look out for include:

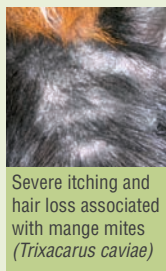
- **Respiratory problems** can cause persistent sneezing and discharge from the eyes, causing your pig to feel unwell and lose their appetite.

- **Skin problems such as mange and ringworm**

**Mange:** Guinea pigs can also carry mange and these burrowing mites can cause itching and hair loss (see photo right).

**Ringworm:** Guinea pigs can suffer from ringworm which can also be passed to humans. This causes scaly skin with sores and may be very itchy.

If you would like any further information on caring for your guinea pig or you are concerned about their general health – please contact us today!



Severe itching and hair loss associated with mange mites (*Trixacarus caviae*)

## Winter aches and pains



The balmy summer months are sadly just a distant memory and as the colder weather kicks in, older pets often noticeably slow down and stiffen up. Just as in ourselves, the low temperatures can really affect their joints. Those pets already on medication for arthritis may need an increased dose, and we commonly diagnose the disease during this time of year.

Arthritis (also termed degenerative joint disease) is a condition in which the joints, which should be smooth moving and well lubricated become rough, cracked and swollen. In the early stages your pet may just seem a bit stiff after resting but still able to exercise freely once they have got moving, but as it progresses the signs become more obvious. They may really slow up on walks, struggle with stairs or start to limp. However, remember that our pets are brave! Very rarely do they cry out in pain, even if you have a good feel at their sore joints.

Arthritis is most common in older pets, largely due to “wear and tear”, but it can strike the youngsters too. For them, rather than simply an ageing change it is generally triggered by conformational issues – essentially malformed joints such as hip dysplasia, which puts a joint under unnatural strain and triggers the painful changes. Cats can also suffer from arthritis, with many surveys estimating between 60-90% of elderly cats being affected.

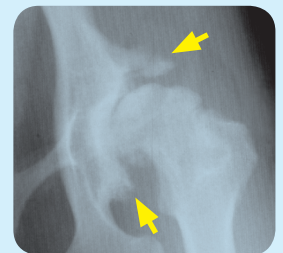
To help your pets with sore joints, especially in the winter, make sure they always sleep on a deep, soft bed and keep the ambient temperatures warm – you could even consider a pet safe heat pad or hot water bottle. Make sure they get out and about every day to keep their joints moving, and don't let them put on any extra winter weight! Obesity will really put their limbs under strain. Finally, make sure you keep up with their pain relieving medications and supplements, if they are on them, and if you are concerned that they may be struggling, please come and talk to us!

### X-rays and arthritis

Radiography is commonly used to investigate joint problems.



X-ray of a **normal hip joint** – note the perfectly formed “ball and socket” joint of the hip joint.



**Arthritic hip joint** in a dog with hip dysplasia. Note the very shallow ball and socket joint and the secondary new bone around the joint (arrowed in yellow)



## Winter Worms!

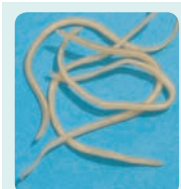
Even in the colder months, we mustn't neglect our worming regimes for our pets!

Worm eggs are shed in their millions in the faeces of infected animals and can survive for many months in the soil, even in freezing conditions, and are then reactivated when ingested. This commonly happens when dogs go sniffing in the undergrowth or cats



groom themselves. Also, some worms are passed by fleas, whose numbers often increase at this time of year, because although outside is chilly, our homes are lovely and warm for them!

Although some pets show symptoms of worms – itchy bottoms, diarrhoea or bloating, many appear completely normal but still carry big infestations. Also, don't forget some of the worms that infect our pets, can also infect humans as well – even more reason to keep up with protection! Please speak to our staff about which worming products would be best for your pets!



Typical roundworms in this case *Toxocara canis*