



**Bright Eyes & Bushy Tails**  
**Housecall and Full-Service Veterinary Clinic**  
3005 Highway 1 NE  
Iowa City, IA 52240  
(319) 351-4256

March 1, 2000  
Quarterly Newsletter

**Jennifer Berger, DVM · Allan Berger DVM, PhD**

Dear friends and clients,

### **New Telephone Number, Administrative Changes**

We've got some additional telephone help from Kara Kendall (one of our two part-time assistants)! At the times we know we're busy, we have our main telephone number forward to Kara's cell phone. Kara schedules appointments, reaches us for emergencies, and answers questions. However, this means that people need to call our main telephone number: 351-4256. We've been using this number for about six months, and it is the only number listed in the current telephone books. Our old number (which is on older business cards, pens, and is in last year's telephone book) is the cell phone Jenn carries. It still works, but it won't forward to Kara. If you leave a message on the old phone we will get it and answer it, but you may get faster service from 351-4256. The emergency pager also works at all times: 229-7344 (leave a callback number with a touch-tone phone).



### **Construction**

The drywall is finally up for the exam room at our home office. We hope to finish off the walls and get a new exam table within the next month. There will be photos in the next newsletter, we promise! We put the sign up in front of our office yesterday. The next time you drive on Highway 1 between Iowa City and Solon, look for us on west side of the road. If Mac (the Great Dane to the left of the sign) is out and you wave, he'll bark a return greeting.

### **Heartworm**

Jenn is cheating and using last year's column for heartworm disease, with only slight modifications.

Spring is here early this year, and that means heartworm season (for some of us). Did you know that not only dogs, but also cats and ferrets are susceptible to heartworm infection? Heartworm disease is caused by a worm called *Dirofilaria immitis* (you can use that little tidbit to impress your family and friends). The heartworm starts its development cycle in a mosquito. If an infected mosquito bites your pet, the heartworm then travels inside your pet to undergo further maturation before finally ending up in the heart.

In dogs, we see several different signs indicating heartworm disease. These include difficulty breathing, decreased ability to exercise, coughing, and weight loss. However these signs develop after heart damage has already begun. Cats can sometimes manifest these same signs, but unfortunately sudden death is also a sign commonly seen in cats with heartworm disease. Less is known about heartworm disease in ferrets.

It's best to avoid heartworm disease entirely by giving preventive to both your dogs and cats: it just takes ONE mosquito bite from an infected mosquito to give it to your pet!! Even indoor pets are at risk; remember back to last summer (what a nice WARM memory) about dusk when you opened the door to go inside? Even though you went quickly, several pesky mosquitoes sometimes got inside.

Luckily for dogs, they can usually be treated with a drug to kill the heartworms, but there are side effects (the commonly used drugs are pretty toxic). Cats aren't quite as lucky because the drugs used to kill the heartworms are even more toxic for them. All we can do is give supportive therapy for cats.

The current testing and preventive recommendations for canine heartworm disease from the American Heartworm Association is to test your dog every other year if he or she stays on monthly preventative year 'round. Dogs that skip doses need to be tested annually. There is no good test for cats, but there's also no good treatment, so preventative is the best we can do. If your pet isn't on a monthly heartworm preventative, please give us a call so we can get started!

### **Pet Poison Prevention Tips**

The National Animal Poison Control Center is a 24-hour emergency hotline for animal poisoning information. They have a great web site at <<http://www.napcc.aspc.org/>>. Although most of their service is consulting with veterinarians on treatment, they also have some good advice about preparing for poisoning emergencies. Jill Richardson, DVM encouraged us to publish these cautions:

- Be aware of the plants you have in your home and yard. The ingestion of azalea, oleander, mistletoe, sago palm, or yew plant material by an animal can be fatal. Easter lily, day lily, tiger lily, and some other lily species can cause kidney failure in cats.
- Never allow your pets to have access to the areas in which cleaning agents are being used or stored. Cleaning agents have a variety of properties; some may only cause mild stomach upset, but others can cause severe burns of the tongue, mouth and stomach.
- When using rat, mouse, snail or slug baits, or ant or roach traps, place the products in areas that are inaccessible to your companion animals. Some bait contains sweet smelling inert ingredients, such as jelly, peanut butter or sugar that can attract your pets.
- Never give your companion animals medication unless you are directed to do so by a veterinarian. Many medications that are safe for humans can be deadly for animals. For example, one 500mg-acetaminophen tablet could be lethal to an average sized cat.
- Keep all prescription and over-the-counter drugs out of your pets' reach, preferably in closed cabinets. Pain killers, cold medicines, anti-cancer drugs, antidepressants, vitamins and diet pills are all examples of human medications that can be lethal to animals, even in small doses. For example, one 200mg-ibuprofen tablet could cause stomach ulcers in a dog weighing 10 pounds.
- Never leave chocolate unattended.

Steve Johnson and Pet Memories are there to provide options that you may need or want during the loss of a special family member—your loved pet.

Available services include cremation, burial, home pickup, and even cold storage for a decision at a later time. Urns, caskets, and markers are available. Knowing your options in advance may help relieve some grief.

Call, and Steve will try to help lessen your loss. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

877-822-7387	Office in Tipton (toll-free)
319-357-4608	Cell phone
319-886-2570	After hours

- Many common household items can be lethal to animals. Mothballs, potpourri oils, coffee grounds, homemade play dough, fabric softener sheets, dishwashing detergent, batteries, cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, pennies, and hand and foot warmers could be dangerous for your pet.
- Automotive products such as gasoline, oil and antifreeze should be stored in areas that are inaccessible to your pets. As little as one teaspoon of antifreeze can be deadly to a cat weighing seven pounds; less than one tablespoon can be lethal to a dog weighing 20 pounds.
- Before buying a flea product for use on your pets, ask your veterinarian for a recommendation.
- Read all of the information on the label before using a product on your pet or in your home. Always follow the directions.
- If a product is for use only on dogs, it should never be used on cats; if a product is for use only on cats, it should never be used on dogs.
- Make sure your pets do not enter areas in which foggers or house sprays have been used for the period of time indicated on the label.
- Make sure your pets do not go on lawns or in gardens treated with fertilizers, herbicides or insecticides until they have dried completely. Always store such products in areas that are inaccessible to your pets.
- If you are uncertain about the usage of any product, ask the manufacturer and/or your veterinarian for instructions.

One of the most common tools we use is hydrogen peroxide. Forcing a pet to drink several tablespoons is a relatively easy way to induce vomiting, and it's faster than medications like Syrup of Ipecac. Keep a fresh bottle of hydrogen peroxide (purchased from any supermarket or drug store) in your house.



Activated charcoal is another great tool. However, any pet that needs charcoal would probably be best served by a trip to the hospital.

### Poisonous plants archive

The University of Illinois maintains a list of poisonous plants. They have the list on line with pictures, descriptions, and basic information about each type of poisoning at <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/vex/toxic/comlist.htm>. If you're wondering about plants in your house or yard, look for them there. Two of Allan's favorites are shown here.

Foxglove (the flowers on the left) is a source of digitalis, a treatment for heart disease. But eat too much, and your heart will stop beating completely.

Snakeroot (right) is the cause of dreaded "milk fever," which killed thousands of settlers as European Americans began farming the Midwest (people were exposed to the toxin through milk from cows that grazed on snakeroot). Both plants can be found in our area.



The final word we'll say on poisonings is that many can be treated **before** a pet shows signs of illness. Once an animal starts acting sick, however, it is often too late. It's always better to be safe than sorry. Call us if you have questions. Keep the hydrogen peroxide on hand, ready for use if directed.

## **Cavies!**

Recently, I've talked about a few reptile and avian diseases. I thought I'd talk about a common Guinea Pig disease for a change of pace. But first, a little on Guinea Pigs in general.

Guinea Pigs (*Cavia porcellus*) are originally from South America. Since Guinea Pigs are relatively easy to keep and are friendly. They make really good pets. There are three common types of domestic Guinea Pigs seen as pets: short-haired English and American varieties, Abyssinian, and Peruvian. The Abyssinian haircoat is short, but grows in rosettes or whorls. The Peruvian Guinea Pigs are the most common show pigs due to their long haircoat.

The average life span of a pet Guinea Pig is 5-6 years, but obesity, a common problem in captive Pigs, can shorten this. Guinea Pigs are quite easy to breed if you want to. There are some tips I can offer, so if you are planning to breed your GP please call me first! If you currently own a Pig you know that they are quite social animals and have all sorts of noises for different types of activities, like greetings, meal times, and even things like opening the refrigerator door.

Guinea Pig housing is relatively simple. Since they don't jump you can keep them in a variety of containers as long as the walls are more than 10 inches high. Glass aquariums, water troughs, and homemade cages are all suitable. I prefer that GPs not be kept on wire because they have a higher rate of foot problems than Pigs on a solid floor. Substrate can be wood shavings, straw, yesterday's newspaper, or cat litter. GPs do need to have their cage cleaned on a regular basis or they can become quite odiferous.

Proper Guinea Pig nutrition and feeding is very important, which brings me to the disease I wanted to discuss. Vitamin C deficiency or scurvy is the most common dietary problem seen in pet Guinea Pigs. Unlike most other mammals, Guinea Pigs are unable to synthesize Vitamin C, so Cavies need Vitamin C rich foods in their diets. Vitamin C is essential for collagen synthesis. Collagen helps to make up blood vessels and helps teeth stay tight in their sockets. Other clinical signs of scurvy include diarrhea, delayed wound healing, rough hair-coat, anorexia, lameness, or just a Guinea Pig that "Ain't Doing Right." A correct Guinea Pig diet would be FRESH guinea pig chow that is used within 90 days of its milling date. Just think of how long that food may have been sitting on the shelf in the store... Also, feed a combination of kale, parsley, beet greens, spinach, red and green pepper, oranges, kiwi, broccoli, tomatoes (which are natural sources of Vitamin C) and a good quality grass hay for roughage.

Diagnosis of scurvy is based on history, physical exam, and sometimes X-rays. Although we can treat scurvy by supplementing Vitamin C with injections, it is a disease that is easy to avoid, and even with treatment can have a long drawn out recovery that isn't always successful.

Guinea Pigs make great pets. They are loving and very gregarious. Check one out at Fountain Falls, Pet Degree, Ma & Paws Family Pet Shop, or your favorite pet store!

### **Cat Quotes**

"There is no snooze button on a cat who wants breakfast."

--Unknown

"Thousands of years ago, cats were worshipped as gods. Cats have never forgotten this."

--Anonymous

"As every cat owner knows, nobody owns a cat."

--Ellen Perry Berkeley

"There are many intelligent species in the universe. They are all owned by cats."

--Anonymous



### **Homer the Wonder Dog**

Adopt a dog! Homer is staying with us for a while, on furlough from the Iowa City Animal Shelter (two of the Animal Shelter staff saved him, and we're just providing a place for him to stay). Homer is about 3 years old, and is an American Staffordshire Terrier (Pitbull). He is neutered. He's very affectionate with people, is leash trained and housebroken. He loves to play, and has lots of energy.

Homer would best be an only dog, but might get along with a submissive female. From spending some time with him it's obvious why the Animal Shelter wanted to save him; he's really sweet. He'll be staying with us for "a while," so if you want to visit him, give us a call.

### **Next Newsletter:**

**June 1, 2000**

As always, ideas for topics for the next newsletter are welcome.

Gratefully yours,  
Jennifer and Allan Berger