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## Taking care of our senior pets

As part of our My Pet Can senior campaign, we've put together some tips for supporting your golden oldie!

### **Comfort is key**

- Provide somewhere comfortable, warm and cosy for your pet to sleep that meets their specific needs.
- Make sure everything they need is easily accessible and provide extra water sources to help them stay hydrated throughout the day.
- Your cat's sleeping, scratching and feeding/watering spots should be within easy reach.
- Cat or rabbit litter trays should be easy to get into, with lower sides and suitable litter. Non-slip mats and steps are also helpful.
- Rugs and carpets prevent slipping and are easier for older dogs to walk on.

### **The right diet**

- Your pet's dietary needs will change as they get older, and your vet will be able to advise you on the best options.
- Monitor how much your pet is eating and drinking, and mention any changes in eating and toileting habits or weight to your vet to rule out underlying medical issues.
- Older cats need easy access to food and should be fed little and often. They may also experience a reduced appetite and weight loss, which can be caused by health issues, a decline in smell and taste or reduced gut efficiency.
- Try feeding dogs with age-appropriate interactive feeding toys, so that have to work to eat.
- Ensure food and water bowls are at the ideal height for your pet. Dogs may be more comfortable eating from a bowl raised to chest height, whereas cats prefer to crouch and eat, so will be better suited to a lower bowl.

### **Meet their changing needs**

- Older dogs need regular exercise and mental stimulation, so walk them little and often (in a coat in colder weather) and keep them at a healthy weight. Letting them sniff, explore and play with toys and feeders also keeps them entertained and mentally stimulated.
- If your dog seems stiff or struggles with stairs or getting into cars, non-slip ramps and steps can help.

- Gentle grooming allows you to check for lumps, bumps, aches and pains, and helps older cats or rabbits who may struggle to groom themselves properly.
- Use extra steps or non-slip ramps to make sure your rabbit can access their shelter or sleeping areas easily.

### **Maintain a healthy lifestyle**

- Maintaining regular activity and a healthy weight gives your pet a better chance of looking and acting youthful – just like humans!
- A decline in eyesight or hearing can cause confusion, so try to reduce changes in their environment and the layout of furniture.
- Regular dental checks are essential for checking for signs of painful dental diseases.
- Older pets might need their nails trimming more often, especially if they're exercising less. If your cat struggles to retract their claws and they thicken or grow into the pad, our team will be able to help.

*Get in touch to learn more.*





## Firework advice

Fireworks season can be tricky for pets, but there are lots of ways you can help keep yours safe and calm.

Here are our top tips for supporting your pet this fireworks season:

- Prepare your pet and home in advance.
- Speak to your vet about anxiety and supportive treatments beforehand.
- Provide distractions and somewhere in your home for your pet to hide.
- Keep pets indoors while the fireworks are happening.
- Secure any escape routes in your home.
- Be mindful of your own behaviour and how it may affect your pet.
- Think ahead and make plans to start a desensitisation programme to help your pet cope with fireworks in the long run.

If you would like more information about managing your pet's stress levels, please get in touch with the practice.



## Arthritis in rabbits

The most common form of arthritis in rabbits, osteoarthritis is a type of inflammation that causes pain and stiffness in the joints. It's usually caused by wear and tear on the joints, and is commonly seen in rabbits over six years old (although it can affect those as young as two).

It can be painful, and although it's progressive and there isn't a cure, your rabbit should still be able to live a full and active life with the right combination of treatments.

Symptoms of osteoarthritis in rabbits include:

- Stiffness or wobbling when moving.
- Changes in where they are willing to go or jump on to.
- Not being able to eat soft morning stools directly from their bottom, and having to scoot around and eat them from the floor.
- A dirty or urine-soaked bottom.
- Not being able to angle their pelvis properly when they pee, meaning they can't empty their bladder completely. This can also lead to bladder sludge or stones.
- Moving around less when it's cold or damp.
- Reduced appetite.
- Unexplained aggression towards you or a bonded partner.

If you notice any of these signs or are concerned about your rabbit, please get in touch with the practice.

**Your vet will be able to diagnose osteoarthritis and recommend some helpful methods for managing the condition, such as:**

- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Putting coverings on slippery floors and surfaces to aid movement.
- Providing a litter tray that is low at the front and has no sharp edges.
- Keeping your rabbit warm in cold and damp weather.
- Providing ramps or steps to get up to hutches.
- Ensuring they have plenty of space to do gentle exercise.
- Giving them things to play with and lots of environmental and feeding enrichment.
- Keeping a careful eye on your rabbit's bottom, grooming them regularly and applying flystrike prevention treatments.

*For further advice, please get in touch.*

## Autumnal hazards

While it's great to take your dog out for a lovely autumn walk, it's important to keep a close eye on them to make sure they don't eat anything poisonous.

The ingestion of acorns, oak leaves, conkers or rotting fruit is a cause for concern, and quick action should be taken. Symptoms may include vomiting, diarrhoea, tummy pain, increased thirst, excessive drooling and, in some cases, tremors.

If your dog shows any signs of poisoning, please contact the practice immediately, as delayed treatment can lead to serious illness such as liver and kidney damage.

