



October 2012 Newsletter

Happy Halloween!

Welcome to the October edition of our newsletter. This month we talk about ear infections, pet insurance, and the toxicity of chocolate! As always, feel free to e-mail us at **aranimalclinic@att.net** with any questions, comments, or suggestions. This newsletter, as well as all past newsletters, will soon be on our website at www.aranimalclinic.com

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Pet Insurance and Your Pet

-Dr. Sperry

Pet Insurance has been around for a long time now, but it seems that many people don't know about it. Insurance can be a great thing for your pet and your wallet, especially when it comes to emergencies. It can help cover the cost of those unseen circumstances, (say, for instance, your dog swallows a Loufa sponge- IT HAPPENS) having insurance will offset the costs of treatment. Often times, insurance will also cover annual vaccines, tests, and heartworm preventatives, depending on the policy.

What to look for:

The first thing you need to know is how Pet Insurance works. It is different than our insurance, in that they don't pay the bill. You still pay your veterinarian, and then submit your claim to the insurance company. They then reimburse you the amount they cover for a procedure or condition (this amount is based on national averages and their internal guidelines).

Example (with completely made up numbers):

- Insurance company A says it will pay \$200 for a dog spay.
- You have your dog spayed, and your bill is \$250.
- You submit your claim, and the company reimburses you for \$200, leaving you with \$50 out of pocket.

The amount that the insurance company pays and the turnaround for reimbursement is dependent on the companies themselves. Often there is a form for us to fill out describing the procedure/condition, and requires a copy of the receipt. We are happy to fill the forms out at the time of visit, or whenever you find it buried in the paperwork/junk drawer at home (or is that just me).

The second thing you need to know is what to look for in an insurance package. It is much better to get insurance when your pet is a puppy or kitten, so that there is no "pre-existing conditions". That is not to say that it is not worth it for an adult, just be aware if you get it for an older dog with, for example, arthritis, the arthritis treatment may not be covered. Many will cover it, but not for a certain time period after the policy was bought (often 2-3 months).

Also, some policies will not cover conditions that a breed is predisposed to. For example, Labs are very prone to tearing their ACL (much like a football player). This is an expensive surgery to repair (\$1200-\$2000). If you insure your lab, even from a puppy, some policies will not cover this because it is a "predisposed condition to the breed". It is important to really examine the policy, and talk to the company representative about what is covered and what isn't.

Where do I get Pet Insurance?

There are many companies that offer pet insurance. Our advice is to shop around and see which company and package meet your needs. Here are some companies to look at:

- VPI- www.petinsurance.com- Has been around the longest (that I know of). Many clients have used them.
- Pet's Best- www.petsbest.com- Has also been around a long time.
- Purina Care- www.purinacare.com- Seems to cover more of the "breed predisposition" conditions and has less wait time to start (can cover some things after 2 weeks) than some of the others.
- ASPCA- www.aspcapetinsurance.com- Through the ASPCA, I have not personally dealt with this one.
- [Petplan](#), [Embrace](#), and [Sheltercare](#) are others. Google Pet Insurance to find many more.
- www.petinsurancereview.com is a website that purportedly reviews and compares the different plans. Full disclosure- I have not thoroughly perused this site to validate its accuracy. I would verify everything at the individual websites.

If you have any questions or just want our opinion on plans, etc, don't hesitate to call.

Ear Infections

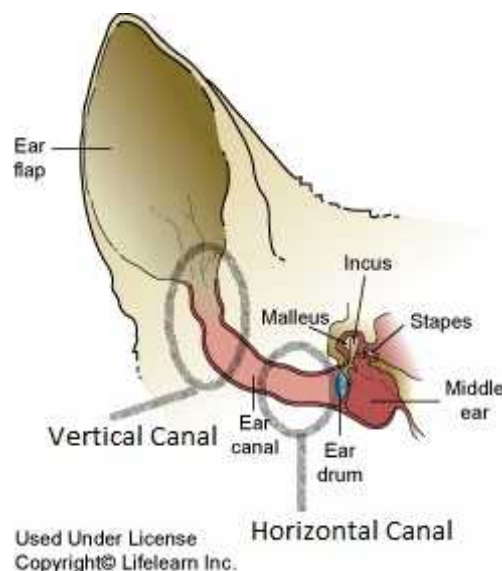
-Dr. Sperry

Friends, Romans, Countrymen, Lend me your EARS! - William Shakespeare

Ear infections are very common in pets, especially in dogs. The ears become very itchy and painful, and the pet will scratch at the ears and shake their head excessively. If they have long ears, it may sound like a helicopter is landing on your house (we affectionately call my dog Chopper Sam). Ear infections can be tricky. Most are easily treated, but there are times when the infection is resistant, and it can take a while to figure out exactly what will treat it.

If ear infections are not treated, they can become chronic, the ears can swell shut, and can sometimes require drastic surgery. We will talk about the causes of ear infections, and how to help prevent them. While we will be mostly talking about dog ear infections (as they are much more common in dogs than our feline friends), all of this information applies to cats as well.

The anatomy of a Dog ear



It does not matter if your dog has floppy ears or ears that stand, the internal structures are the same (floppy ears just make more noise when they shake!). Their canal is different than ours. A human ear canal goes straight in without turning. This means that anything in the ear can come out easily. Dog and cat ear canals are not straight. They start by going down (vertical canal), then have an almost 90° turn to run to the canal (horizontal canal). This means that anything that goes in the ear (like excess moisture) has to go uphill to come out. This two part canal makes the dog much more susceptible to ear infections.

Signs of an ear infection

- Shaking the head and scratching the ears- this is the number one sign clients bring in their pets for when an ear infection is present. The dog will often keep everyone up all night shaking (again, can sound like a helicopter!) and scratching. The ears will often be very red, and sometimes painful when you touch them.
- Discharge from the ear- Another thing people will notice is “gunk” coming from the ear. This is often black/brown or yellow. This often persists after cleaning. This is because most OTC cleaners will clean the ears, but not treat the infection, which is causing the gunk.
- Odor from the ear- “His head stinks!” The infections can definitely cause a foul smell in the ear, especially if they have been simmering for a while.

Causes of Ear Infections

Moisture

The number one cause of ear infections in animals is excessive moisture in the ears. The moisture gets trapped down in the ear canal and forms a swamp. The bacteria and yeast that live on the skin normally then bloom in the swampy canal, and an infection is born! The moisture can come from several sources:

1. Allergies- The cause of probably 90% of all ear infections is allergies. The allergies cause a dog (or cat's) skin to secrete more oils. This

includes the skin on the ear pinna (flap). The oil falls down in the ear, and voila- instant swamp.

2. Swimming/bathing- It is possible that water that gets into the ear during bathing or swimming can lead to ear infection. This usually happens when allergies are already present, or when the bathing/swimming is frequent and excessive. While possible, it is not near as likely as allergies. If you are worried about this, a routine ear cleaner used after bathing or swimming should flush the ears. You may also use a solution of 50/50 Rubbing alcohol/vinegar to flush the ear, but if the ear is red and irritated, this solution will burn.
3. I have seen one case of ear infection caused by one dog licking excessively at another dog's ear, but this is not common.

Parasites

Ear mites. This seems to be the first thing clients think of when an ear infection occurs. Ear mites are a tiny mite that invades the ear, and are infective. They are also rare in animals that live in a controlled environment. Ear mites are usually seen in stray cats and kittens (they are common in stray cats). In dogs they are usually seen in puppies from shelters and puppy mills. For pets that live in a house, apartment, etc, mites are extremely rare.

Breed Dispositions

Some breeds are more predisposed to ear infections than others. Dogs with allergies (Westies, Golden Retrievers) often show their allergies with ear infections. Labs and German Shepherds are prone to ear infections as well.

Cocker Spaniels have the world's worst ears by breed. Often this is not from infection but from excessive buildup of cerumen (oil and dead skin).

Cockers tend to build new skin cells every 7-14 days (as opposed to the 21 days of other breeds). This leads to overproduction of cornified skin cells in the canal. These extra skin cells pile up, and the dog cannot get rid of them.

This leads to a swelling of the canal, which can lead to infections. With Cockers, it is often beneficial start them on a cleaner that flushes the excess cerumen (Cerulytic) once weekly when they are puppies.

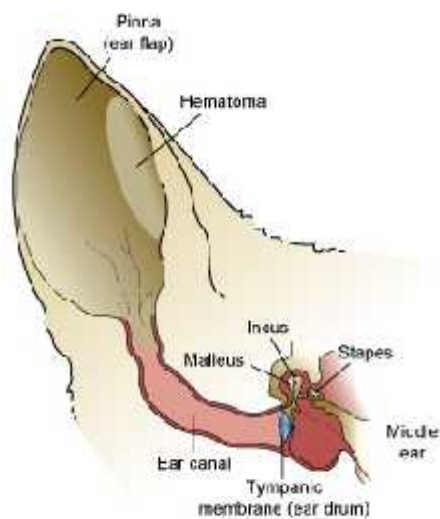
Tidbits:

Treatment:

Treatment usually involves a topical ointment placed in the ear. There are times when oral antibiotics or anti-inflammatory drugs need to be used as well. In rare cases, the bacteria in the ear is resistant, and must be sent to the lab so that it may be tested to find out what antibiotics it is susceptible to.

Ear infections should be treated early. Chronic ear infections cause the ear canal to swell. If this happens over a long period, the canal can become ossified (form bone) and be permanently closed. If this happens, the only recourse could be surgery to remove the ear canal (ablation). This means the dog will be deaf, but often they are already deaf due to the infection.

Hematoma:



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A hematoma is when the skin of the ear pinna (the part sticking up or flopping) becomes separated from the cartilage inside the ear. This

separation is usually caused by excessive shaking of the head and ears. The ear then swells and fills with blood like a water balloon. This needs to be treated quickly, or the ear will scar down crumpled and hard. You cannot just drain all the blood out of the ear once, it will keep refilling. Treatment usually involves placement of a continuous drain for 3 weeks to allow the ear to heal. This is another reason it is important to treat ear infections in a timely manner.

Food Allergies:

As we said, allergies are a major cause of ear infections. This can be allergies to pollens and things in the air (much like us), but it can also be a reaction to food. If your pet has recurrent ear infections, especially if they happen year round (allergies to pollens tend to go away in the winter), then your pet may have an allergy to the food it eats. It doesn't mean the food is a bad food, just that your dog is reacting to it (much like lactose intolerant people cannot drink milk). It also doesn't matter if it is the same food he has always eaten. If so, a food change can help keep the ear infections from coming back. Check our [website](#) for more information on food allergies.

Plucking

To pluck or not to pluck? Plucking the ears is very controversial. Some groomers do it without asking, others flat refuse to do it. The consensus among dermatologists is that if your dog has ear issues, then pluck the hair (the hair can clog the canal, leading to infections and hindering medication from reaching the canal). If your dog doesn't have ear problems, then don't pluck. If the ears are plucked, it is good to have an anti-inflammatory ointment to put in the ears for a day or two afterwards as plucking can cause inflammation in the canal.

Ear infections are very common, and can be painful both to pet and owner. With proper (and timely) treatment, we can help get everyone through them.

Chocolate – The Bad and the Ugly

-Dr. Jacky May



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As Halloween approaches, there is no better time to point out that candy is not limited to causing problems in overindulging children. Chocolate can actually be toxic to pets depending on the type and amount ingested. Be certain to store all your chocolate candies out of reach of your pets.

Chocolate contains substances called methylxanthines which are similar to caffeine. When ingested by pets in small amounts methylxanthines may cause digestive upset (vomiting and diarrhea), panting, hyperactivity, and excessive thirst. In larger amounts they can cause more serious signs such as abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, seizures, and even death.

Different types of chocolate have different amounts of the methylxanthines. White chocolate has the lowest level followed by milk chocolate and seldom do pets ingest enough of those types to do more than cause an upset stomach. Dark chocolate (semi-sweet) has a higher amount and can cause more severe problems if too much is ingested. Baker's chocolate has the highest amounts and can easily be a toxic problem even with small amounts of ingestion.

Examples of amounts of different chocolates that could affect a typical 20 pound dog are :

	<u>Very mild</u>	<u>Mild to Moderate</u>	<u>Moderate to Severe</u>
Milk Chocolate	2.25 ounces	4 ounces	7 ounces
Dark Chocolate (semi sweet)	0.75 ounces	1.5 ounces	2.75 ounces
Baker's Chocolate (unsweetened)	0.25 ounces	0.5 ounces	1.00 ounces
Unsweetened Cocoa Powder	0.1 ounces	0.25 ounces	0.5 ounces

Bear in mind that these amounts are estimates and can vary depending on the brand of chocolate and the manufacturing process. Also be aware that susceptibility to chocolate toxicosis varies according to a dog's individual sensitivity and pre-existing health issues.

What steps should you take if your pet ingests chocolate? Use the above guide as a reference. If it is an amount and type of chocolate that is likely to cause moderate to severe signs then definite action should be taken in the form of seeking veterinary assistance and monitoring for the dog.

If you know that it has been less than an hour since the ingestion then you can try to induce vomiting at home by administering hydrogen peroxide by mouth. The dose for hydrogen peroxide is 1 teaspoon (5 ml) per 5 pounds of body weight for a dog or cat. Do not exceed 3 tablespoons (45ml) per dose regardless of the size of the dog. This initial dose may be repeated safely once if the initial dose did not produce vomiting within 15 minutes.

If it has been longer than one hour since the ingestion of chocolate, then inducing vomiting might still help, but a great deal of the chocolate may already have been absorbed and other measures may be necessary.

Just recall, if you have a large dog and it has eaten only 2-3 small milk chocolate candies then the concern is minimal and you will not need to induce vomiting. You will cause more digestive upset trying to make them vomit than such a small amount of milk chocolate would have.

If you are not sure, then always call – either us or the Emergency Animal Clinic. It is helpful to know the type of chocolate and the rough amount that is missing when you do call so that we can tell you whether you have concern for serious toxicity or not.

Read more on chocolate toxicity on our website using [lifelearn](#) (just search for chocolate). Remember, the safest way to deal with chocolate toxicity is to keep the candies out the pets' reach!

Halloween Contest

There is still time to submit entries to our Halloween contest. Send us pictures of your pet(s) in Halloween costumes to aranimalclinic@att.net, or to our [facebook](#) page. The Deadline is Oct 25. Prizes are a free office visit to be used in the next year.