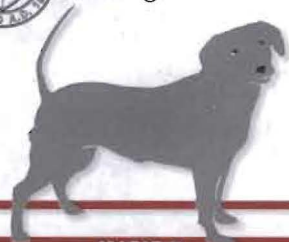




Cornell University  
College of Veterinary Medicine



# DOG Watch

Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine

Vol. 17, No. 6 ♦ June 2013

## INSIDE

### Short Takes 2

Singles, men especially, turn to pets for a sense of family; food recalls.

### Common Grooming Mistakes 3

These safe, stress-free alternatives can ease the way to success at home.

### Why Do They Dig? 5

It depends on seasonality, venue and, most important, purpose.

### Ask the Experts 8

Why does their adult Chesapeake Bay Retriever nurse her toys?

## IN THE NEWS ...

### Tracking the Reasons for Shorter Longevity

Scientists and owners alike have long puzzled about the reasons for large breeds' short lifespans. They theorize big dogs age faster, develop age-related problems sooner or may simply have an increased risk of mortality throughout life.

When researchers at the University of Goettingen in Germany examined demographic data, such as age and cause of death, on more than 50,000 dogs and 74 breeds treated at North American veterinary teaching hospitals, they found "a strong correlation" between the accelerated-aging hypothesis and early death. They determined dogs lose about one month of longevity for every 4.4 pounds of body mass.

Their analysis indicates that the adult life of large dogs unwinds in fast motion, researchers say in the study they detailed in the April issue of the journal *American Naturalist*. They now see their work as a jumping-off point for studies focusing on the most prevalent causes of death in large breeds. ♦

## The Year-round Threat of Ticks

*It's growing because of our friendliness toward wild animals, our inviting backyards and disuse of pesticides*

It doesn't matter if you live in a cold or hot climate, on either coast or in America's heartland, ticks pose a year-round threat to dogs — and you — in every state. The sad reality is that there are more than 800 types of ticks capable of transmitting more than a dozen diseases, some lethal. These eight-legged parasites are minute arachnids that have survived for centuries and often go undetected as they feed on their host's blood.

The best weapons to wage war against ticks are new medications to prevent infestation and kill them, and the education of owners so that they can take the proper steps to protect pets. That's the message from two of the country's top authorities on ticks: Dwight Bowman, Ph.D., M.S., professor of parasitology, and William H. Miller, VMD, professor of dermatology. Both are at the

(continued on page 6)

## It's Not All Fun and Frolic at the Park

*Injury and illness can result from fights, disease and parasites, but you can take steps to avoid them*

Dog parks are the fastest-growing type of city parks in the U.S. In 2011, 100 of the largest cities had a total of 579 off-leash dog parks, up 64 percent from five years earlier, according to the nonprofit Trust for Public Land.

The reason for the increase is clear: "Dogs are now more important than ever in the family hierarchy, so expectations for their welfare have increased," says Gretchen L. Schoeffler, DVM, a specialist in emergency and critical care at the Cornell



Large and small dogs should have separate areas.

University College of Veterinary Medicine. Expectations include having a designated place for them to socialize, exercise and run freely.

More dog park visits also mean more risks to dogs' health and safe-

ty, however. Veterinary Pet Insurance paid \$8.6 million in claims related to dog parks in 2011. The company sorted its database of more than 420,000 policies on dogs to identify the most common park-related injuries and medical conditions:

(continued on page 4)



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## SHORT TAKES

### Singles Turn to Pets for a Sense of Family

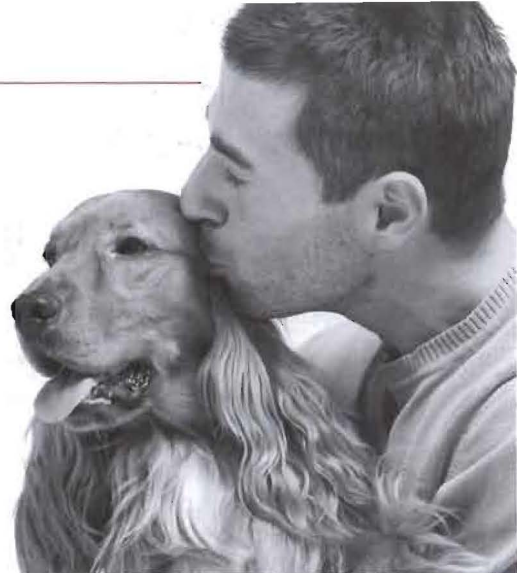
An intriguing trend has developed among singles in the U.S. More single people — men particularly — are becoming pet owners at rates greater than families. They're "turning to pets for love and a sense of family," according to a survey by the American Veterinary Medical Association.

In a five-year period, pet ownership among the never married, widowed and divorced grew from 46.9 to 54.7 percent, or 16.6 percent. Excluding people who never married, growth in pet ownership among singles rose 17.7 percent, from 51.3 to 60.4 percent.

The increase in both groups significantly outpaced the growth in ownership among pet-owning families. Their households predominate in pet ownership, but from 2006 to 2011, the increase rose from 65.5 to only 66.4 percent, or 1.37 percent.

Single female pet owners still outnumber men, but the survey shows that may be changing, says AVMA President Douglas Aspros, DVM. Overall, pet ownership among men grew by 27.7 percent. The chart on this page shows the increase of dog ownership among them and other "non-families" from the AVMA's *U.S. Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook*. "It's interesting to see that more and more single people are discovering the comfort and satisfaction that owning a pet can offer," Dr. Aspros says. "Pets are powerful, positive influences on our lives, offering unique emotional, psychological and physical health benefits to their owners."

Despite this positive trend, Dr. Aspros laments the decline in veterinary visits. More



BIGSTOCK

**Pet ownership among men grew by 27.7 percent** in a five-year period, according to a survey by the American Veterinary Medical Association.

than a quarter of pet-owning households — 25.5 percent — didn't visit the veterinarian at all in 2011.

"That .... is worrisome, not only in terms of the pet's health but in terms of public health," Dr. Aspros says. "Families, no matter what size, need to bring their pets to the veterinarian — at least once a year — to maintain optimal health."

### More Pet Food Recalls

The potential for salmonella contamination has prompted Natura Pet Products to voluntarily recall certain bags of California Natural, Evo, Innova and HealthWise pet foods. The recall affects products sold at veterinary clinics, pet specialty retailers and online in the United States, Canada, Korea, Malaysia, Japan, Hong Kong and Costa Rica.

No salmonella-related illnesses were reported, said the company, a division of Procter & Gamble. Signs of salmonella poisoning in pets include lethargy, diarrhea, fever and vomiting. People who handle

contaminated pet products may be similarly affected. For more information: 800-224-6123 from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. CDT Monday through Friday and [www.naturapet.com/recall](http://www.naturapet.com/recall). ♦

U.S. PET OWNERSHIP & DEMOGRAPHICS SOURCEBOOK

THE INCREASE IN DOG OWNERSHIP AMONG SINGLES		
	2006	2011
MALE LIVING ALONE	17.8 %	26.4 %
FEMALE LIVING ALONE	22.5 %	31.3 %
MALE LIVING WITH NONRELATIVE	37.8 %	38.8 %
FEMALE LIVING WITH NONRELATIVE	45.4 %	41.2 %



# Seven Common Grooming Mistakes

*These safe, stress-free alternatives will help ease the way to successful at-home sessions*

Canine coats come in many styles — long, short, curly and coarse — but all dogs benefit by having regular baths, their nails trimmed and coats brushed. To ensure your successful at-home grooming sessions, Hayley Keyes, executive director of the International Professional Groomers Inc. and an international master certified professional dog and cat groomer, shares smart tactics to avoid seven common mistakes.

“The bottom line is that you want these grooming times to be safe and stress free for the both of you,” says Keyes, who operates the Nanhall Pet Spa/School of Grooming in Greensboro, N.C. She offers alternatives to grooming miscues:

- ◆ **Picking the wrong shampoo.** Read the label carefully. Never try to bathe your dog with shampoo formulated for humans. “Some ingredients in human shampoo can cause skin issues in some dogs,” Keyes says. “Select a quality, protein shampoo that addresses the type of coat your dog has — oily or dry. Mild shampoos often contain oatmeal and aloe.”
- ◆ **Getting water in your dog’s nose.** Best to hold his face downward. Even better, use a wet, warm washcloth to clean his face. “Dogs with pushed-in faces like Pugs have their eyes and nose close together and you can risk drowning them if you hold their heads up and spray directly into their faces,” she says.
- ◆ **Getting soap in your dog’s eyes.** Put only a dab of shampoo on the washcloth. If you do accidentally get soap in your dog’s eyes: “Rinse, rinse, rinse and do not freak out,” Keyes says.
- ◆ **Forgetting bath accessories.** Be sure to have the bath items you need in the bathroom or other cleaning

area: at least two thick bath towels, shampoo, the proper brush, hand-held hair dryer and bite-sized treats. “When your dog is all soapy, you don’t want to suddenly discover that you forgot to bring in the towels,” Keyes says.

- ◆ **Failing to thoroughly rinse the coat before drying.** Otherwise, he may start to chew his coat, develop skin irritations or even hot spots, Keyes says. “One way to tell if you have rinsed thoroughly is to bring your ear down to the coat and squeeze the wet hair. If you hear a squeaky clean sound, that is means you have rinsed out all the shampoo.”
- ◆ **Scaring your dog with a hand-held blow dryer.** Have several thick bath towels within reach. Encourage your dog to do a full body shake before using the first towel. For a small dog, snugly wrap him in the second towel and hold him closely. “Walk around with him in your arms for about 10 to 15 minutes to hasten the drying and use this time to speak sweetly to help him feel calm and secure,” says Keyes. “If you do use a hair dryer, brush the coat first and then use the dryer only at a low setting to avoid burning your dog’s skin.”

**A thorough rinsing can help** prevent chewing on the coat, skin irritation and hot spots.

- ◆ **Cutting the nails too short, causing bleeding.** Gain confidence by practicing on a similar object. Take a stick about the thickness of your dog’s nails and dab nail polish on the tip. Practice using a nail trimmer made for dogs on this stick and be careful not to cut above the polish line — the imaginary location of the nail’s quick. Trim just to the quick to avoid accidental bleeding. “Keep styptic powder within reach just in case you do nick the quick,” Keyes says.

Final advice: “If you want to learn how to do something correctly, like doing a maintenance trim in between grooming appointments,” Keyes says, “ask your professional groomer to teach you the proper way to hold and use the scissors to avoid accidentally nipping your dog’s skin.” ♦





**DOG PARKS...** *(continued from the cover)*

- ◆ Sprains and soft tissue injuries
- ◆ Lacerations and bite wounds
- ◆ Kennel cough/upper respiratory infection
- ◆ Insect bites
- ◆ Head trauma
- ◆ Hyperthermia, or heat stroke
- ◆ Parasites
- ◆ Parvovirus

"We haven't found dog park-related injuries to be super-common at our hospital," says Dr. Schoeffler, who is Chief of Emergency and Critical Care Services at the Cornell University Hospital for Animals. "But as a referral hospital, we often see more serious injuries. For minor bite wounds and lacerations that might happen at a dog park, people tend to turn first to their primary care veterinarian."

In addition to fight-related injuries, dogs congregated in a smaller area may also spread diseases to one another. "Kennel cough is the canine equivalent of the common cold but with a dry, hacking cough," Dr. Schoeffler says. "Although it is more often seen in indoor dogs confined in close quarters such as a kennel or shelter, kennel cough can potentially spread among dogs in a dog park as well. Usually, dogs recover quickly, but in very young or very old

dogs, or those with a compromised immune system, it can progress to pneumonia." Ask your dog's veterinarian if he would benefit from a vaccination for kennel cough.

Parvovirus can be transmitted via stool or vomit anywhere dogs gather, Dr. Schoeffler says. "This is a very hardy virus that can live outdoors for up to six months. Fortunately, there's a well-proven parvovirus vaccine, which is recommended for all dogs."

By law all dogs must be current on their rabies vaccinations. "There can be huge implications for an unvaccinated dog who bites another dog or a human," Dr. Schoeffler says. "Depending on the circumstances, the health department may require mandatory quarantine — or even that the dog be euthanized."

If you have a small, large dog or overweight dog, take extra precautions at the park. Visit parks that have separate areas for small and large dogs. "Small dogs are automatically at a disadvantage when tussling with large dogs," Dr. Schoeffler says. "Even though your Chihuahua may act like he's going to kill that Great Dane, the fact is that one bite from that Great Dane might be fatal."

Conversely, if you have a large dog, be sure he is well-trained and under your control before taking him to a park and putting smaller dogs at risk.

**Start Slowly.** "Particularly if you have a larger, overweight dog, check with your veterinarian before beginning an exercise program, and build your dog up slowly," Dr. Schoeffler says. "Knee injuries are common in such dogs and often they are directly correlated with activity levels."

In warmer weather, dogs who are pushed too hard may end up with heat stress or heat exhaustion. "Pay attention to signs that your dog wants to slow down or stop and rest, and let him," Dr. Schoeffler says. "Remember that dogs don't sweat and can't dissipate heat as effectively as we do. Always have water on hand and offer it frequently."

In colder weather, short-haired dogs might benefit from wearing a coat. Oth-



**Fenced parks offer dogs the opportunity for abundant exercise and socialization with their own kind.**

ers might be more comfortable wearing winter booties when conditions are snowy or icy.

"Several times a year we treat dogs who have fallen within our local gorges while out hiking with their owners," says Dr. Schoeffler. "One advantage of dog parks is that they're plotted out in fairly safe, flat areas."

But as safe as dog parks may seem, unpredictable events can happen. "Think ahead to what you would do and where you would go in an emergency — both during regular hours and after hours," Dr. Schoeffler says.

**Prepare for Emergencies.** "Keep the phone number of your veterinarian and local emergency veterinary hospital with you, and know how to get there. Keep the poison control number on hand, too, in the event that your dog ingests a toxic mushroom, gum or chocolate that may have been dropped by a careless owner. A rope can be a good idea in the event your dog is injured and you need to leave him to go get help."

Finally, after ensuring your dog is fit and healthy, and you're keeping a keen eye out for his safety at the park, take time to enjoy the outdoors together and — the bonus for him — the company of other dogs. ❖

**WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW**

- ◆ Take only healthy, vaccinated dogs to the park: "Keeping your dog's vaccinations up-to-date protects both him and his playmates," says Gretchen L. Schoeffler, DVM, DACECC, at Cornell.
- ◆ Take only sociable dogs: If your dog is aggressive, don't take him to the park.
- ◆ Supervise your dog: "Pay attention to what's going on," Dr. Schoeffler says. "I consider my dogs well behaved; however, if a squirrel runs by, all bets are off!"



## Why Do They Dig? It's Complicated

*This occasional series explores the reasons for dogs' often intriguing behavior. If you would like to suggest a topic, please write DogWatch Editor, 800 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854, or email [dogwatcheditor@cornell.edu](mailto:dogwatcheditor@cornell.edu).*



**Northern breeds create dens like their wolf ancestors** while others excavate the backyard and still others take to the beach.

Dogs dig in the snow to create dens for warmth. They dig in the backyard, hollowing craters that rival a moonscape, and they dig at the beach, gleefully tossing sand in the air around them. Their venues vary according to season and accessibility, but dogs rarely engage in the behavior for mere entertainment.

"Usually the reason is to reach a goal," says Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., former president of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus professor of animal behavior at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "The goal can be a critter, burying or finding a bone, a cool place excavating a den or even imitative behavior if they have observed their owner gardening."

**Pursuing Vermin.** At least a half dozen Terrier breeds, including the aptly named Rat Terrier, were originally bred to burrow and catch ver-

min. Dachshunds' long, sleek bodies and short legs make them ideally suited for below-ground hunting.

However, Northern breeds are the most likely to dig, says Dr. Houpt. "The reasons may be that they are closer to their den-creating wolf ancestors or because they are big enough to dig large holes or because they are most likely to seek a cool place in warm weather because of their thick coats."

**Savings Account.** Burying bones harkens back to dog ancestors' practice of saving prey left over from the hunt — they cached it in case of a food shortage. While we serve our domesticated dogs more than enough kibble and treats to avoid starvation, some continue this survivalist tactic, tossing in a toy or two for good measure.

Owners may worry that digging can indicate compulsive behavior, but Dr. Houpt hasn't encountered such

a case. "The most concerned owner discovered that her yard was infested with rodents. The dog's behavior was normal in those circumstances."

Stopping your dog from digging can be difficult unless he's on a leash — attached to you whenever he's outside, she says. "Some people have suggested placing chicken wire in the hole under a shallow layer of dirt to discourage the dog or placing rocks or water in the hole, but he may simply choose another place."

"Others have advocated giving the dog a place to dig with impunity with toys or food treats buried for him to find," Dr. Houpt says. "Unfortunately, there is not evidence for this or any other treatment's effectiveness."

Her best alternative: "It is always better to give the dog something else more interesting to do than dig. Outside toys such as large balls or tug toys suspended from trees or a wading pool can help." ♦



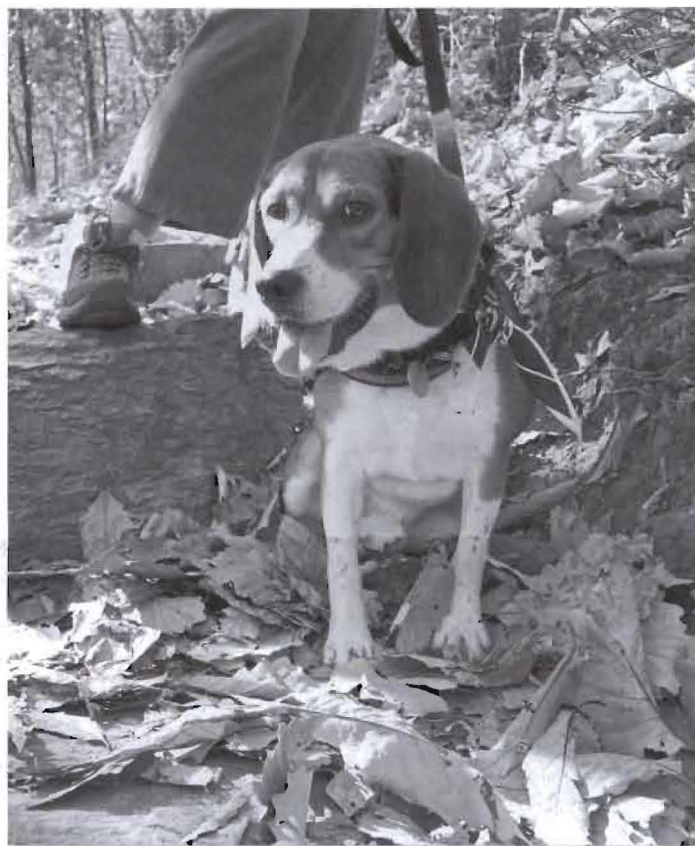
**TICKS...** *(continued from the cover)*

Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

"We are getting more ticks for three main reasons," says Dr. Bowman, immediate past president of the Companion Animal Parasite Council, an independent group established to create guidelines for the control of parasites that threaten pets and people. The

**Welcome Mat.** "First, we are much friendlier to wildlife. There are huge deer and turkey populations that help feed ticks. Second, we are doing away with manicured lawns and opting for lush backyards with streams or water fountains, trees, bushes and bird feeders that attract deer and squirrels into our yards. Third, we are more opposed to using pesticides in our backyards, which only puts out the welcome mat for ticks and rodents to come closer to our homes."

Ticks are stubborn survivalists, but veterinarians and scientists are dogged in their efforts to combat them, says Dr. Miller. "There are many products for



After a hike or a walk in tick-infested areas, check your dog from head to toe for them.

dogs that are licensed to control fleas and ticks. The efficacy of the various products depends on the number of fleas and ticks in the local environment

and the lifestyle of the pets." For instance, flea and tick control is much more difficult for a dog who lives in the country and swims frequently because some liquid topical tick preventives are not water resistant.

For the past decade, monthly topical tick preventive medications administered between dogs' shoulder blades have been a popular choice among owners, but no one product is guaranteed to be 100 percent effective on all dogs. On the forefront, Dr. Miller sees merit in a new generation of tick preventives being developed in pill form that are not yet available.

Many years ago "flea and tick" collars were very popular but didn't perform well. Today, the collar delivery system has been updated to increase its efficacy and duration of action. Collars with amitraz or one of the various permethrins are available for dogs.

## THE SAFE WAY TO REMOVE TICKS

It's natural to be startled when you discover a tick on your dog, but take a breath, exhale and follow this step-by-step guide for its safe removal:

- ◆ Put on rubber gloves to prevent touching the tick directly and putting yourself at risk for contracting a tick-transmitted disease.
- ◆ Use fine-tipped tweezers or a tick-removal tool. Never use nail polish, petroleum jelly or, worse, a hot match. They are ineffective and can cause the tick to emit more of its disease-carrying saliva into your dog.
- ◆ Part the hair on your dog's coat to better locate the entire tick. Use the tweezers or tick-removal tool and grab the tick by its head and steadily pull it away from your dog's skin. "Pulling close to the head makes it
- more likely that the whole tick will be removed without releasing any of its bodily fluids," says dermatologist William H. Miller, VMD, at Cornell.
- ◆ Dispose of the tick properly. It may be a female tick with eggs inside her body, so you need to drop it into a bottle of isopropyl alcohol and tightly seal the bottle. Alcohol kills ticks. Never drop the tick into the toilet because ticks have air sacs that enable them to survive in water.
- ◆ Dab an antiseptic on your dog's skin where the tick was removed and reward him with a healthy treat for behaving during the removal.
- ◆ Wash your hands thoroughly with warm, soapy water and rinse.





CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Ticks such as the lone star, left, black-legged and brown dog tick sense a dog by the paws' vibrations on the ground or a sudden rise in temperature.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, here is a rundown of the six serious tick-borne diseases in the United States affecting both dogs and people:

◆ **Anaplasmosis:** Caused by the bacterium *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*, this disease is transmitted chiefly by the black-legged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), also known as the deer tick. Symptoms include headache, chills, muscle aches, lameness, diarrhea, vomiting and fever. It is more common in the Northeast and in California.

◆ **Babesiosis:** Caused by a protozoa, this disease infects red blood cells and triggers fever, anemia and weight loss. The deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) is the primary transmitter of this disease that peaks during the warm months and is prevalent in the South.

◆ **Ehrlichiosis:** This is an umbrella term representing a group of bacterial diseases caused by three different species and transmitted usually by the lone star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*) and

the brown dog tick. Symptoms include fatigue, muscle aches, fever and bleeding from the eyes. The lone star tick is prevalent in the North and Southeast.

◆ **Lyme disease:** This bacterial infection, left untreated, can cause extensive joint damage, heart problems, kidney failure and neurologic dysfunction. It is primarily transmitted by the black-legged tick, also known as the deer tick. Lyme disease is more prevalent in the Northeast, but cases of Lyme disease in dogs have been reported in all 48 contiguous states. A vaccine is available to protect dogs against Lyme disease — consult your dog's veterinarian.

◆ **Rocky Mountain spotted fever:** This disease is caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia rickettsii* and transmitted by the bites from the American dog tick, Rocky Mountain wood tick and the brown dog tick. Infected dogs may develop a rash, fever, vomiting, and muscle and abdominal pain. Some dogs have stiffness trying to walk.

Populations of the brown dog tick are found in every one of the 48 contiguous states.

◆ **Tularemia:** Informally known as "rabbit fever," this disease is caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*. As its name implies, it is found in rabbits and rodents and transmitted to dogs through bites by the American dog tick, most populated in the Midwest and East. Symptoms can include a low fever, loss of appetite and listlessness.

"The major problem with ticks is that they are vectors for various infectious agents," says Dr. Miller. "Ticks are unable to fly or jump. They climb to the top of blades of grass and weeds and wait for a host to pass when they move from the plant to the host — which could be your dog."

Ticks are savvy and sense the arrival of a host by the vibrations of paws on the ground or a sudden rise in temperature caused by the dog's body heat, Dr. Miller says. As soon as the tick attaches itself to your dog, the bacteria start to reproduce in the area surrounding the bite. Pathogens pour into the bloodstream and symptoms begin.

Your best defense against ticks causing disease in your dog? "I believe that pets need to be on year-round flea and tick control from birth to death," says Dr. Bowman. "And always check your dog thoroughly from head to tail after taking a hike. Finally, always make sure your dog receives a thorough physical examination by a veterinarian at least once a year, ideally twice a year. That visit should include health screen diagnostic tests." ♦

## A NEATLY TRIIMMED YARD WILL DISCOURAGE TICKS

Prevent your backyard from becoming a haven for ticks by:

- ◆ Keeping your grass trimmed.
- ◆ Avoiding placement of bushes and shrubs along the exterior walls of the house.
- ◆ Discouraging wildlife, especially deer and squirrels, from roaming your yard.
- ◆ Treating your yard with a pesticide not toxic to pets.

"Keep the grass cut short and use fencing to keep your pets out of areas that cannot be cut," Dr. Miller says. "If a pesticide is to be used, make sure that the product is specifically licensed for yard use and is used according to label directions."





**Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D.,** diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus professor of animal behavior at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, provided the answer on this page.

**Please Share Your Questions**

We welcome questions of general interest on health, medicine and behavior. We regret however, that we cannot comment on specific products and prior diagnoses. Please send correspondence to:

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**COMING UP ...**

ROBOTIC DOG



INFLAMMATORY  
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NUTRITION  
FOR SENIORS



ANAL GLANDS



## Why Does Their Adult Retriever Nurse Toys?

**Q** My husband and I have been married 50 years and for almost all of those years have had a dog. There is one strange behavior that our current Chesapeake Bay Retriever has that completely baffles us and we look forward to receiving your input on this.

Jane is almost 9 years old and was spayed when she was approximately 7 months old. We went through the usual, with her destroying a few toys while teething, but being a Retriever with a soft mouth, she quickly outgrew that.

When she was about 18 months old, she began nursing one of her soft toys.

I know your first thought: She had been taken away from her mother too soon. However, that did not happen. The breeder is a very well known Chessie breeder, and Jane was almost 10 weeks old when we went to pick her up. Until that weekend, the puppies were all together and had been weaned correctly from their mother. So why does Jane nurse her toys?

**A** First, congratulations on 50 years of marriage. Second, congratulations on taking such good care of your Chessie. If she had been deprived of suckling experience as a puppy, I would have expected the toy sucking to begin as soon as you brought her home. The normal mother nurses her pups 22 times a day for the first week, spending almost all her time with them.

The frequency of nursing decreases with time until most puppies are weaned naturally by 2 months. In order to wean, well-fed mothers simply move away from their puppies when they try to suckle and may even resort to snapping at them. It is interesting that stray dogs in India, who presumably are not well fed, nurse their litters for another three weeks.

Puppies can be deprived of suckling time if their mother was nervous and kept moving them from place to place or if she was aggressive to them and had to be restrained in order for the puppies to suckle. Another possibility is that the puppy was pushed away from the best nipples by bigger, more vigorous litter mates.

Finally, the puppy may have had plenty of suckling experience but did not receive much milk. This can happen if the mother has too many puppies or is herself malnourished. There are lots of possible explanations for non-nutritive sucking in dogs, but that is not what I think is happening in your home because of the late onset of her sucking behavior.

The behavior you have observed is not uncommon in dogs. Some dogs suckle on their own paws; others use their paws to create a nipple from their bed and suckle on that. I once received a large box with nothing in it, except a bed sheet. There were many saucer shaped holes in the sheet. The owner wondered why his dog, a Doberman

Pinscher, was destroying his bedding.

The dog wasn't chewing on the fabric — he was sucking on it. Dobermans are, in fact, predisposed to this behavior. Some of them suck on their own flanks. Nicholas Dodman, BVMS, at Tufts discovered the gene responsible for that behavior — the first gene found to determine a specific behavior problem in dogs. It would be interesting to see if your dog has the same gene, that is if fabric sucking and flank sucking are the same behavior.

Sucking is a comfort behavior. For example, many children suck their thumbs as they fall asleep. Fortunately, I don't think your dog is likely to develop orthodontic problems as a result of her sucking behavior. It may be a sign of anxiety. All too many of our dogs seem to be anxious, but if sucking calms her and allows her to rest, it is less likely to have side effects than anti-anxiety medication. You might try an Adaptil (canine pheromone) collar to see if that reduces the sucking behavior.

Good luck and may all three of you enjoy your golden years. ❖

**'Some dogs suckle on their paws; others use their paws to create a nipple from their bed and suckle on that.'**

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