



Cornell University  
College of Veterinary Medicine



# DOG Watch

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

Vol. 18, No. 2 ♦ February 2014

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## IN THE NEWS ...

### A Campaign Targets Impostor Service Dogs

Canine Companions for Independence, an organization providing assistance dogs for people with disabilities, has launched a letter-writing campaign to urge the U.S. Justice Department to stop "service dog fraud."

It says the increase in some online sales of assistance dog vests and identification allows people to claim untrained pet dogs are service animals so they will be permitted in public places.

"As a result of this fraudulent practice," CCI says, "people with disabilities who have a legitimate need for an assistance dog face added discrimination and are being denied access to public places" in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

People with service dogs are concerned about their highly trained dogs' safety in the company of pet dogs and about invasion of their privacy when business owners ask the nature of their disability, CCI says, adding that businesses are also concerned about health violations and damage to merchandise from misrepresented dogs. ♦

## Saving Diseased and Damaged Teeth

*Advances in root canals, such as Cornell's use of rotary instruments, result in success rates equal to humans'*

Root canal treatments for dogs might sound far-fetched, but they're performed at university hospitals and specialty practices around the country to save damaged and diseased teeth that might otherwise be extracted. In fact, newly available techniques and equipment in veterinary medicine have advanced the field of endodontics — the study and treatment of the dental pulp — to the point where root



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**Chew toys** should be so soft a fingernail can dent or mark them. Harder chews can fracture a tooth.

canal treatment success rates in pets equal those in humans.

In the past three years, Santiago Peralta, DVM, chief of the Section of Dental and Oral Surgery at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, has helped move the animal hospital's use of hand instruments for root canal treatments to more precise rotary instruments.

**Safer Procedures.** The result: The advanced techniques provide better results and more

(continued on page 6)

## Do You Have a Demanding Dog?

*He's learned pawing, licking or barking has payoffs, but you can stop the behavior — simply ignore him*

At some point, your dog's endearing displays of affection and attention-seeking may cross the line of good manners. He could move on to pawing, head-butting and urgent barking.

Then you have a demanding dog on your hands. The behavior doesn't make the list of top reasons — such as aggression toward people and other animals — for dogs being relinquished to animal shelters.

Behaviorist Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., professor emeritus at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, seldom encounters demanding behavior as the main problem in her clients' dogs. "It is usually mentioned secondarily to biting

or separation anxiety," she says. "In fact, demand for attention is one of the signs of separation anxiety. The dog becomes anxious when his demands for attention are not met immediately."

**Effect on Relationship.** However, demand behavior does represent a significant annoyance that can affect your relationship, especially if at the end of your patience, you respond inappropriately. We all know yelling constitutes abuse.

Pushy dogs resort to demands to obtain:

- ♦ Our rapt attention. "The most common demand is poking the owner with the nose or paw," Dr. Houpt says. "Little dogs may

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## SHORT TAKES

### Walk your dog and make new friends, a survey says

Research on the benefits of pet ownership have established that petting and talking to an animal lowers blood pressure and stress levels, and that pet owners make fewer visits to the doctor.

Now research suggests that pet ownership can have a broader impact on community connectedness by encouraging friendliness and safety. A survey of 2,500 adults in Australia and the United States found that pet owners are more likely to meet people and make new friends — dog walking was cited as one of the top five ways. More pet owners than non-pet owners got to know people after moving into a neighborhood.

"What we find is that if you are a dog owner and you are out and about with your dog, you get to know people much more easily, have more friends and get integrated into the community better," says Sandra McCune, Ph.D., a behaviorist and leader of Human-Animal Interaction at the Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition in Leicestershire, England.

People walking their dogs become involved with other people beyond a just say "Hi" relationship, Dr. McCune says. "They actually start forming friendships where they're getting tangible, measurable types of support."

The study also found that pet ownership leads to increased physical activity and improves the perception of neighborhood safety among both the owners and wider community. "People who go out with their dogs ... know their community better and they're the eyes on the street," Dr. McCune says.

The study, presented at a conference of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations in Chicago, was funded by Mars and its Waltham Pet Care Centre. Mars' brands include Pedigree, Banfield Pet Hospitals and Royal Canin. Waltham supports research on nutrition and the relationship between humans and companion animals.



A survey finds dog walking is one of the top five ways to make new friends and increase the perception of neighborhood safety.

### The High Cost of Accidents

In analyzing the 1.1 million claims it received in 2012, Veterinary Pet Insurance identified allergies, ear infections, vomiting and bladder infections as among the most common ailments.

When it determined the top 10 cat and dog medical conditions related to accidents, soft tissue injuries topped the list. Bruising usually resulted from falling, running and jumping, with the typical office visit costing \$169. The other common conditions associated with accidents by ranking:

2. Cruciate (knee) ligament injuries without surgery
3. Cuts or bite wounds
4. Scratch or wound on the eye
5. Cruciate ligament injury with surgery
6. Mouth trauma or fractured tooth
7. Sprain or joint injury
8. Abrasions or superficial injury
9. Foreign object ingestion
10. Torn or injured nail

Accidents accounted for 10 percent of all claims in 2012 and totaled \$37 million paid to policyholders. Although many pet accidents can't be prevented, owners can take steps to decrease the risk, VPI says. Among them: being aware of your pet's surroundings to avoid environmental dangers, such as poisonous plants, and supervising your pet's physical activity and interaction with other animals. ♦



# Why a Haircoat Can Change Color

*Sunlight and aging are among the reasons, but so are skin and hormonal disorders, and serious disease*

Much to the consternation of caring owners, dogs' coats can sometimes change color. Usually, this is a normal occurrence, with little cause for alarm. Puppies often begin life with different colors and markings that they outgrow as adults. Older dogs' hair can turn gray, particularly around the muzzle, as they age.

However, other factors can also cause a change of hair color, says dermatologist William H. Miller, VMD, Medical Director of the Cornell University Companion Animal Hospital. He advises paying attention to your dog's coat over time to help you gauge the quality of his health.

**Topical Insult.** "Unless the owner can associate the color change with some topical insult to the hair — for example, a bath with a benzoyl peroxide shampoo or excessive swimming, or unless the color change is known to be something harmless, such as sun bleaching or old age — hair color change can indicate that something in the dog's body is abnormal. And that should prompt a visit to the veterinarian."

Nutrition is rarely an issue these days since most dogs eat balanced dog food diets, Dr. Miller says. "And sun bleaching is fairly common in dogs who swim

frequently and dry off in the sun after each dip." But a number of medical conditions can also cause pigmentation changes in dogs. These range from skin disorders, such as flea allergies and mange, to hormonal deficiencies such as Cushing's disease, or hypothyroidism, to serious illnesses such as cancer.

"Diseases that impact ingestion, absorption or distribution of the nutrients, especially the trace minerals, the animal eats can impact the quality, texture and color of the hair," Dr. Miller says. "Endocrine disease, especially hypothyroidism and the disorders associated with abnormal sex hormone production, can alter hair color either because the hair isn't growing as fast and is subject to sun bleaching or because the mechanism whereby the pigment is transferred to the growing hair is abnormal."

**Geography Matters.** If the skin or coat has a color other than white — including brown, black, red and yellow — it is said to be pigmented. If the skin is darker than normal, it is said to be hyperpigmented. Some conditions associated with pigment change may be more common in certain geographical areas, with light-colored coats becoming darker in cold winter months and dark coats growing lighter in sunnier climates, especially if those dogs are frequently outdoors.

"There is a disease called vitiligo where the pigment cells — called melanocytes — disappear and don't return," Dr. Miller

says. "This depigmentation can be focal, regional or generalized. And while the coat-color change by itself doesn't cause any symptoms, if the hair and underlying skin turn white due to vitiligo, then that area is particularly prone to sunburn."

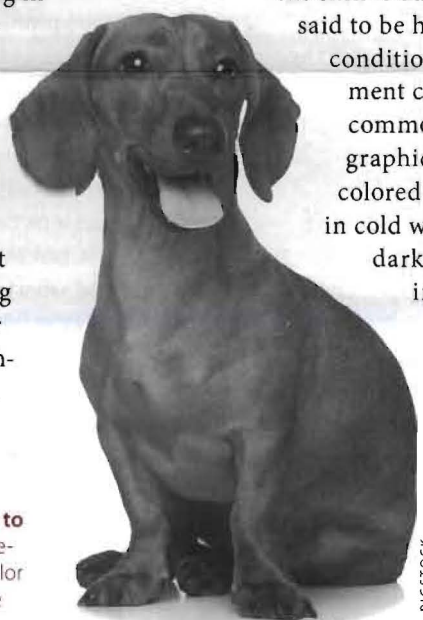
Some breeds are susceptible to changes in hair color. "Different breeds tend to get certain diseases that may or may not induce depigmentation," says Dr. Miller. "For instance, Dachshunds are prone to Cushing's disease. If a dog gets that disease, the coat color will change lighter."

**Temperature's Effect.** Other dogs have temperature-sensitive melanocytes, Dr. Miller says. "If the exposed area is cold, it becomes lighter-colored. If warmed, it returns to its normal dark color or may even become darker than normal. The classic example in dogs is 'snow nose.' Here, the dog's nose goes from dark brown to beige or even pink during the winter, only to become dark brown again in warm weather."

Although any area can be affected, "Dog owners tend to notice hair color change first on the face, since that's where we look at our pets most often," Dr. Miller says.

A quick diagnosis may be difficult. "While it's easy to document hair color change with the naked eye, the underlying cause can be determined only by a complete and thorough history and physical examination," says Dr. Miller. "This provides the veterinarian with an idea of the disorders that might be causing the color change. Such disorders can then be confirmed by the appropriate diagnostic tests and addressed."

Color change doesn't necessarily require treatment and really can't be treated if it's age-associated graying, Dr. Miller says. "But if the color change is due to a disease other than vitiligo, resolution of the disease will resolve the hair color issue. The prognosis is good, in that if the disease can be cured, the hair color should return to normal." ♦



**Dachshunds are prone to Cushing's,** and if they develop the disease, the color of their coat will become lighter.

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# Those Startling Reverse Sneezes?

*They aren't life threatening, and a few quick, easy steps like rubbing the throat can shorten an episode*

A reverse sneeze looks alarming. The dog may stand still with his elbows out, eyes wide open while rapidly snorting inward and extending his neck. An owner might panic, believing the dog is suffocating.

A sneeze also sounds alarming. "I do not know exactly how to describe it," says Andrea N. Johnston, DVM, an internal medicine specialist and former instructor in small animal medicine at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "It is a cross between a sneeze and a gag."

Adding to the puzzle, the dog, who was normal one moment and suddenly appeared to be choking, returns to normal immediately afterward. In the case of reverse sneezing, sounds and appearance usually deceive. The sneezing isn't life threatening, and owners can take a few easy steps to shorten the episode.

**Common Malady.** Any dog can experience reverse sneezing — it's thought to be quite common. Some dogs are prone to it all their lives; others develop it as they age. Long-nosed (dolicocephalic) breeds seem most susceptible, Dr. Johnston says. However, in short-nosed (brachycephalic) dogs, reverse sneezing can result from sucking the elongated soft palate — the soft tissue at the back of the mouth — into the throat.

An episode lasts from a few seconds to a minute or two. It may happen from breathing dust or occur after a nap, play, exercise or a meal. "There are many potential causes," Dr. Johnston says. They include:

- ◆ Foreign bodies in the nose
- ◆ Rhinitis, the irritation and inflammation of nasal passages
- ◆ Nasal tumors
- ◆ Inhalants such smoke, perfume, potpourri, pollen

- ◆ Eating and drinking quickly
- ◆ Sudden changes in temperature

"Ultimately, the exact cause is unknown," Dr. Johnston says. "What's known for certain: the irritation in the nose, sinus or pharynx causes a throat spasm — a noisy reverse sneeze." At-home video on your cell phone or another device is a good tool to record the event and show your dog's veterinarian.

One remedy is simple and inexpensive: petting. Rub the dog's sides and back, and scratch his throat. Some owners find that lightly covering the dog's nostrils causes the dog to swallow. Swallowing helps to stop the sneezing.

"Just try to relax your pet. Petting or gentle verbal soothing may be helpful," Dr. Johnston says. "Changing environments may also benefit the dog — moving from an allergen-rich environment, such as outdoors, to a cool, calm environment, possibly indoors."

Take note of your dog's location and actions immediately before sneezing occurs and note its length. "The duration is very dependent on the cause," Dr. Johnston says, adding that if the signs are progressively worsening over minutes to hours, then veterinary help should be sought.

**When to Worry.** "Many clients describe an isolated episode of reverse sneezing," she says. "If this is an isolated or rare event, then I tell them not to worry about it, but if it is acute, or sudden, in onset, increasing in severity or frequency, then I will recommend more advanced diagnostics such as nasal CT (imaging), rhinoscopy (a procedure in which a small camera is passed into the nasal passages) and possibly nasal biopsy."

If the sneezing seems like a problem — if it happens daily or several times a



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**If a single episode of reverse sneezing worsens in severity or frequency, a veterinary exam with advanced diagnostics is warranted to rule out an underlying condition.**

day and is prolonged or it's accompanied by nasal discharge — a veterinary visit is warranted.

The veterinarian will consider the dog's medical history and your description of the sneezing. A physical exam, blood tests, allergy tests or imaging may be used to rule out upper respiratory infection, collapsing trachea, nasal tumors, polyps or other underlying conditions.

When no underlying causes are found but the problem is ongoing, or the reverse sneezing is related to allergies, the veterinarian may prescribe an antihistamine or a steroid medication — but medication is not usually needed.

A once-in-a-while event is not cause for serious concern, Dr. Johnston says. "Choking is a much more obvious and worrisome scenario. If a pet's airway is blocked, then the gagging or coughing will escalate rapidly. The pet may display evidence of dyspnea (difficulty breathing) and potentially cyanosis (blue mucous membranes)."

For most dogs, although reverse sneezing sounds and looks frightening, it turns out that an event eased by petting isn't so frightening after all. ◆



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

resort to barking more often because they can't reach above the knee."

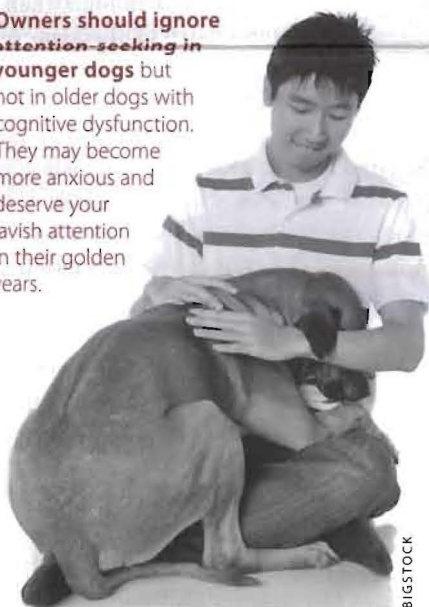
- ◆ More food, treats, shared dinner-table bounty.
- ◆ A favored spot on the bed.
- ◆ Nonstop engagement with guests — company!

One theory holds that demand behavior began in the wild when dogs had to assert themselves — step to the front of the line — to survive. But for the most part among caring owners today, our dogs have it easy. Foraging for food stops at the refrigerator door. Comfort from cold begins under a thick duvet.

Dogs persist in their demands quite simply because we reward their efforts. "Certainly, it's the owner's fault if when the dog noses them, they pet him, or if the dog barks, they feed him," says Dr. Houpt.

**Overly Clingy.** Health doesn't seem to play a role in demand behavior. "The only medical problem that I associate with attention demands is cognitive dysfunction," she says. In its online checklist of symptoms of canine cognitive dysfunction, the ASPCA says that while some dogs become less interested in petting and greeting people, others need constant contact. They engage in repetitive licking of family members and become overly clingy.

**Owners should ignore attention-seeking in younger dogs** but not in older dogs with cognitive dysfunction. They may become more anxious and deserve your lavish attention in their golden years.



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**'ANY FORM OF ATTENTION REINFORCES THE BEHAVIOR'**

Pam Perry, DVM, Ph.D., a resident in animal behavior at Cornell, offers this advice to retrain a demanding dog:

**When he paws and barks excessively for attention:**

"Ignore any undesirable behavior completely. Do not say anything, look at him or touch him. Any form of attention will reinforce the behavior. Instead, teach him to perform an acceptable behavior, such as lying down on a mat with a chew toy."

**When he begs for more food and treats:**

"If you ignore him for begging at the table and then give in after 20 minutes, you reinforce the behavior. The next time you try to ignore him during dinner, he will hold out for at least 20 minutes and probably much longer. If you give in again after 30 minutes, then his behavior will become even harder to extinguish."

"When you finally decide to ignore the behavior completely, your dog will try even harder to get the reward, which is known as an extinction burst. You must never give in to your dog's demand if you want the behavior to cease. Eventually, your dog will realize his behavior does not result in a table scrap and will stop begging. Better yet, feed him or give him a food-dispensing toy before you dine so he will be less motivated to beg."

**When he wants to monopolize visitors' attention and the best space on the bed:**

"Teaching a dog who pesters guests to lie down quietly on a mat or dog bed will be much easier if you make it work for him — make the reward of lying on his bed greater than the reward of pestering your visitors. The easiest way is first to train him to lie on the bed on command and then provide him with something enjoyable, like a peanut butter-filled sterile bone or a cheese and popcorn-stuffed Kong toy. When your guests arrive, tell your dog to go to his bed and give him the treat. Use a long-lasting treat, or he will bug your company when he is finished eating it. Alternatively after he greets visitors, you can confine him in a room with a long-lasting chew or food-dispensing toy."

"Getting a dog off the bed can be tricky if you do it cold turkey. The best way is to make the transition gradually. Place a thick blanket or pad at the foot of the bed and encourage your dog to use it by giving him a treat when he lies on it. Then place the blanket or dog bed on the floor next to your bed — again reinforcing its use with a tasty treat. If your dog persists in trying to join you on the bed, tether him to a sturdy piece of furniture with enough slack so he can turn around and lie down comfortably. If he's crate trained, then you can confine him in the crate in a corner of the room."

"In this case, treatment with the diet formulated for dogs with this problem or one or more of the supplements for senior dogs will help," Dr. Houpt says. "Although we tell owners to ignore attention-seeking completely with younger dogs, that is not always true with older dogs, especially those with cognitive dysfunction because

they may become more anxious. Then the owner should reinforce a more acceptable behavior that is incompatible with the pushy behavior. For example, if a dog constantly paws at the owner, he could be taught to sit quietly next to the owner. Otherwise, give him lots of attention in his golden years." ♦



## ROOT CANALS ... (continued from the cover)

favorable outcomes. Because rotary files are much more efficient, the length of a procedure under general anesthesia is reduced significantly, ultimately making the procedure safer for the animal.

"Rotary endodontic files are attached to an electric handpiece that allows precise control of speed and torque, which reduces the chances of complications during a root canal treatment," says Dr. Peralta, who is board-certified in veterinary dentistry. "Also, the files are made of a nickel-titanium alloy, making them incredibly flexible and more resistant to breakage and other complications compared to conventional stainless steel hand files."

Nickel-titanium rotary endodontic instruments were first developed for use in humans more than two decades ago, but specially designed instruments for small animals have started to become popular in veterinary medicine only in the past decade, Dr. Peralta says.

**Wide Availability.** Today, rotary endodontics is widely available in both private practice and academic veterinary medicine. "However, because

endodontics requires advanced training and skills, and a large amount of costly equipment and materials, root canal treatments are usually not available through general practitioners, only through board-certified specialists," Dr. Peralta says.

The most common reason for a root canal treatment in dogs is dental trauma. "Fractured or discolored teeth are frequently devitalized and lead to chronic low-grade pain, and sometimes acute swelling and/or drainage," Dr. Peralta says. "The treatment options are generally a root canal treatment or extraction. Even though extraction is a valid definitive solution to a non-vital tooth, a root canal treatment offers the advantage of preserving the tooth and is a less invasive treatment option."

In human medicine, root canal treatments are performed on any dam-



**Daily brushing** can help teeth healthy and identify dental problems early on.

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aged or diseased tooth. In dogs, root canal treatments are more likely to be recommended for strategic teeth that are of greatest functional significance. These include the canine teeth (the long, fang-like teeth at the front of the mouth), the upper incisors (in front of the canines) and the carnassial teeth (rear teeth used for tearing), Dr. Peralta says.

Veterinary dentists perform root canal procedures when the pulp inside the tooth becomes damaged or the nerve of the tooth becomes infected. They remove the nerve and pulp, then clean and seal the tooth. The goal is to preserve the tooth's function without the pulp and nerve.

**Signs Overlooked.** Anyone who has ever experienced a toothache, particularly one that necessitated a root canal treatment, knows it can be extremely painful, but dogs tend to hide their pain and rarely show obvious signs of discomfort. Many owners remain unaware of their dog's dental problems or dismiss other signs of problems because he doesn't seem overly bothered. However, ignoring the problem prolongs the dog's pain and can lead to more serious complications (see sidebar on Page 7).

## AN OPTION FOR YOUNG PATIENTS: THERAPY TO RETAIN THE TOOTH'S PULP

In certain — although rare — cases when a dog's tooth is damaged, options extend beyond root canal therapy and extractions. According to the American Veterinary Dental College, vital pulp therapy can be performed on recently fractured teeth in patients under 18 months of age.

Vital pulp therapy is the treatment of the tooth pulp to try to keep it alive, as opposed to a root canal in which the pulp is removed from the tooth. In this therapy, a superficial layer of the pulp is removed to eliminate surface bacteria and

unhealthy tissue. A medicated dressing is placed on the newly exposed pulp to stimulate healing and provide anti-bacterial properties. Finally, a protective barrier of dental composite is placed over the exposed area.

Veterinary dentists avoid performing this procedure on older patients, as there is a higher risk of failure compared to root canal therapy. Success is determined by additional X-rays approximately three to six months after the procedure. If vital pulp therapy fails, a root canal might be required.



Spotting a damaged or infected tooth can require owner vigilance. In rare cases, a fractured or infected tooth might be associated with swelling in the dog's mouth and face, or fluid draining below the eye. Antibiotics might temporarily resolve these symptoms, but if the problem is related to a damaged tooth, they will recur. More often, owners must look for more subtle — and sometimes behavioral — signs. A dog might avoid chewing on one side of his mouth or hesitate to chew on formerly beloved toys.

Beyond observing behavior, owners should regularly inspect their dog's teeth by lifting the lip with the mouth closed. Any fractures or discolorations should be brought to the attention of a veterinarian.

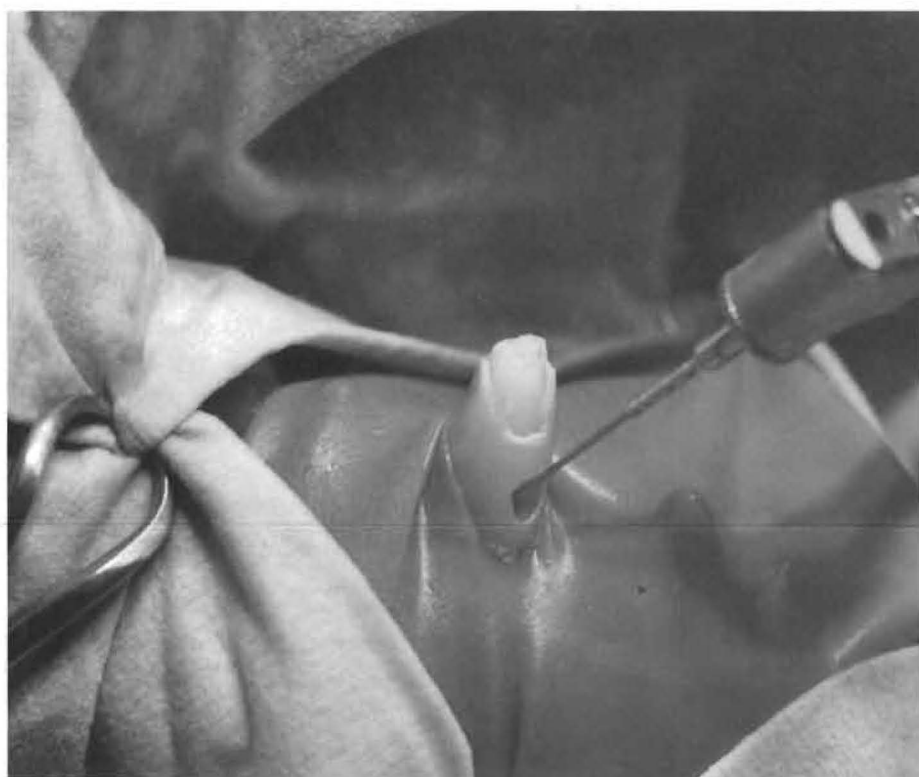
If a tooth fracture is observed or an infection is suspected, dental X-rays are the first step in diagnosis. The images help the veterinarian evaluate the bone surrounding the tooth and confirm whether the pulp or nerve of the tooth has been affected.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Complications related to fractured teeth can go well beyond a painful mouth. If ignored, a dead tooth can lead to:

- ◆ Infection
- ◆ Tooth abscess formation
- ◆ Facial swelling and fluid draining below the eyes
- ◆ Bacteria entering the bloodstream

Quite often, owners who thought their dogs were untroubled by fractured teeth report their pets act younger and more energetic after a root canal treatment or extraction, providing more evidence that pets' pain is not always demonstrated as obviously as we might expect.



DR. SANTIAGO PERALTA

**Cornell has moved beyond the use of hand instruments** for root canal treatment to more precise rotary instruments. The electric handpiece allows precise control of speed and torque, which reduces the chances of complications.

**Determining Options.** Based on the findings, the veterinarian can determine whether tooth extraction or root canal therapy is the better option. Although preserving the tooth is desirable, in some situations an extraction might be recommended over a root canal treatment, particularly if damage to the tooth is extensive.

Dogs of any age and breed can be affected by tooth fractures that warrant a root canal treatment or extraction. Younger pets, however, might have additional treatment options available to them, such as vital pulp therapy (see sidebar on Page 6.) if fractures are recent. A discussion with your dog's veterinarian about all options is the best course.

The cost of a root canal treatment can be significant. It starts at around \$1,000 to \$1,200 and will vary depending on the tooth or teeth that require treatment, Dr. Peralta says. "This cost usually includes pre-anesthetic blood-

work, general anesthesia, dental X-rays and the procedure." In humans, root canals can be performed without the need for general anesthesia. Understandably, pets require complete immobilization for such a delicate procedure performed inside the mouth.

Although tooth trauma and disease in dogs aren't entirely preventable, owners can reduce the risk. "A common cause of dental trauma is chewing on objects or toys that are too hard," Dr. Peralta says. "As a general rule, chewing toys must be soft enough to allow a fingernail to create a small dent or mark on its surface. Otherwise, it may be too hard and will very likely result in a dental fracture."

Regardless of preventive measures taken, dental trauma can still occur. Fortunately, veterinary dentistry has made progress in only a decade, and prompt attention to problem teeth can alleviate pain and greatly enhance a dog's quality of life. ♦





**Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D.,** here with her Carin Terrier, Denver, provided the answer on this page. Dr. Houpt is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus professor at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

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## COMING UP ...

### HOW DOGS SEE



### LAMENESS



### WEIGHT MANAGEMENT



### LUPUS

## Lola Sees Animals But Has 'People-recognition Problems'

**Q** I have a 2-year-old Lab-Springer Spaniel and originally thought she couldn't see very well. Now I think Lola can see fine but has people-recognition problems. We have had her for over a year, so she should know who we are at a distance, but she doesn't. She recognizes us when we are close to her and she can smell us or we speak to her, but she has total recognition of an animal. She will bark at any animal on TV or outside and will see an animal (birds in particular) at a distance and bark and run to catch it. Can you please explain her behavior?

**A** You can have your dog's eyes examined by your veterinarian. He or she would be able to determine if Lola had some medical condition that compromises her vision. It is unlikely that a young healthy dog like yours would have cataracts. Many breeds are affected with progressive retinal atrophy, and genetic tests can confirm that, but it is much less likely in a crossbred dog like yours.

The veterinarian can also determine if she is nearsighted. The normal eyeball is round like a marble, but the nearsighted eye is shaped like a grape. I have grape-shaped eyeballs and, as a consequence, must wear glasses with Coke-bottle thick lenses. The veterinarian will look into Lola's eyes with an ophthalmoscope and note in measurements called diopters at which distance the retina can be seen. If the retina is farther away than normal, your dog may be nearsighted.

You can't test a dog's eyesight with an eye chart because even if she can see the letters, she can't tell you what she is seeing. To test a dog behaviorally, you teach the dog that if she touches a certain symbol — for example, an O — she is rewarded. If she touches another, she is not. This would take some weeks. Next you would make the two symbols smaller and smaller until the dog could not reliably pick the correct symbol.

Your dog is not blind because she responds to some visual stimuli like birds or TV images. She

probably can see you at a distance but not very well, and we don't have physical characteristics to tell the dog we are a friend. We don't wag our tails or prick up our ears. Our tongues don't hang out when we are relaxed

and friendly. To dogs, all humans look alike! Our faces may be different, but dogs don't look at our faces first. They tend to look where they sniff us.

In addition, dogs generally have poorer vision than we do, but they do see movement better. If a bird sits still or the TV image does not move or make a noise, she won't see it. If you are standing perfectly still, Lola is less likely to recognize you.

There is another reason you should keep moving if you want her to recognize you. Even humans use people's posture and gait to recognize them from a distance, so try walking back and forth in front of her when you are farther away than the distance where she begins to respond to you. She can see better in poor light than we can so she may recognize you before you see her on a dark night.

We have probably selected for (bred) dogs who do not respond quickly to the approach of people because many breeds were selected to be guard dogs. They were supposed to regard any approaching human with suspicion until they were sure it was a family member. Lola is being absolutely sure it is you. She barks at other dogs and strangers and at you until she recognizes you. Lola is doing her job!

Dogs are better at auditory cues than visual ones at a distance. Lola knows your voice and probably the sounds of your car's tires but not those of a stranger's car in the driveway. Finally, you can teach her to recognize you by calling to her as you approach. She will learn that that blob on the horizon is really her beloved owner. ♦



**A veterinary examination** can determine if Lola, a 2-year-old Lab-Springer Spaniel, has a medical problem affecting her vision.

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