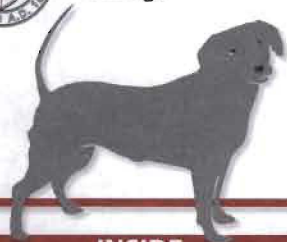




Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine



DOG Watch

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

Vol. 18, No. 6 ♦ June 2014

INSIDE

Short Takes 2
Gauging wolf-dog cognition; insulin injections; phasing out a pesticide.

The Magic Words: Road Trip! 3
Simple travel tactics can help keep them safe and generally stress-free.

When Normal Yeast Goes Wild 4
Overabundance results in substances that irritate the skin and scratching.

Why Do They Sniff Rears? 7
They're greeting each other but also exchanging information.

Ask the Experts 8
What's the basis for an otherwise happy Corgi fleeing during meal preparation?

IN THE NEWS ...

Where the Money Went for Pet Expenses in 2013

Spending on pets will reach \$59 billion this year, up 4.9 percent over 2013, according to the American Pet Products Association. The surprising category with the greatest proportion of growth last year: pet services such as grooming, boarding, training and pet sitting. It grew by 6 percent to \$4.4 billion.

The food category was first in spending at \$22 billion, up 4.5 percent, while veterinary care was second at \$14 billion, an increase of 5 percent. "People are pampering their pets more than ever, and manufacturers and businesses are offering new products, services and opportunities to meet their needs and wants from interactive and innovative toys to dog walking, doggy daycare and pet-friendly hotels, restaurants and airlines," says APPA President Bob Vetere.

The forces driving the increases include owners' emphasis on pets' health and their humanization. Following human food and diet trends, spending on food is expected to be a record breaker this year. ♦

The Risk of Low Vitamin D Levels

Cornell research suggests a deficiency in the 'sunshine vitamin' is associated with congestive heart failure

Studies in human medicine have shown that the benefits of vitamin D range from strengthening bones and lowering blood pressure to fighting disease. Now Cornell research suggests a vitamin D deficiency could be a risk factor in congestive heart failure in dogs.

"There is evidence in people that insufficient vitamin D levels are associated with congestive heart failure and in some studies have been associated with a poor clinical outcome," says Marc S. Kraus, DVM, a senior lecturer in cardiology at Cornell University



Rhodesian Ridgebacks were among breeds in the Cornell study.

College of Veterinary Medicine. "Our team wanted to know if vitamin D levels are decreased in dogs with congestive heart failure (CHF) as opposed to dogs free of heart disease and whether vitamin D levels are related to clinical outcome."

Team of Specialists. The answer they found: Vitamin D levels in dogs with CHF were indeed lower than in the dogs in the control group. Furthermore, low levels of the vitamin were related to shorter longevity. Their study, published in the *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine*,

(continued on page 5)

Cataracts Strike Any Breed, Any Age

They progress at varying rates and, if untreated, can lead to inflammation, painful glaucoma and blindness

If your once-athletic dog can no longer catch a tossed treat, or your senior pauses before descending a flight of stairs, his vision may be cloudy because of cataracts in one or both eyes.

Cataracts are opacities that develop within the normally clear lens, the structure inside the eye that is responsible for focusing. Cataracts block light from being focused onto the retina, the membrane at the back of the eye whose tiny cells are responsible for generating images. In dogs with cataracts, a haziness or cloudiness of the lens may be evident in the later stages of the condition.

Pressure on the Eye. If untreated, cataracts can cause blindness. Over time, they

can also lead to inflammation inside the eye (uveitis) and glaucoma, a painful disease associated with high pressure inside the eye, says Seth Eaton, VMD, ACVO, an ophthalmology consultant and former staff ophthalmologist at Cornell University Veterinary Specialists in Stamford, Conn.

"Cataracts can develop in any dog at any age and they can progress slowly or come on very quickly," says Dr. Eaton. "A cataract may grow inside one or both lenses. At the microscopic level, the normally clear proteins in that lens are undergoing a progressive change that can eventually cause blindness."

Aging can contribute to the development of cataracts in senior or geriatric

(continued on page 6)

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SHORT TAKES

Are Wolves Better Learners or Imitators?

Researchers at the Wolf Science Center in Ernstbrunn, Austria, used a simple experiment to arrive at a complex hypothesis. They had 14 wolves and 15 mixed breeds, all about 6 months old, all raised by hand and living in packs, observe a trained dog open a wooden box with his paw or mouth for a food reward. Then the wolves and dogs had a go at it.

The result: The wolves outperformed the dogs. All of them opened the box after watching the trained dog, most often using their paws or mouth as he had done. Only four dogs opened the box, using their mouth or paws.

The researchers working at the center, Friederike Range and Zsófia Virányi from the University of Veterinary Medicine in Vienna, hypothesize that dog-human cooperation originated from cooperation among wolves; however, during domestication, they say dogs accepted humans as social partners and lost the ability to learn by watching other dogs. They “relaxed” their dependency on conspecifics — those of the same species — which led to reduced motivation and the mental ability to interact with them. (Dogs are a sub-species of wolves.)

Their study, “Wolves Are Better Imitators of Conspecifics than Dogs,” was published in Plos One.

‘Automatic’ Insulin Injections

People have had the option of managing their diabetes by using injectable insulin pens for years. Now the Food and Drug Administration has approved the first insulin pen for diabetic dogs and cats. The refillable pens automatically measure the prescribed insulin dose.

Merck Animal Health developed pens to make giving insulin injections more convenient for owners, says Kathleen Heaney, DVM, director of technical services, “and precision dosing makes it easier to consistently deliver an accurate dose compared to syringes.” The pens will be offered at a number of veterinary clinics in the U.S. to help owners administer insulin safely and effectively, the company says.

Diabetes is a growing problem, with the number of affected dogs tripling in the past 30



BIGSTOCK

A study at the Wolf Science Center suggests that cooperation between dogs and humans owes their origin to dogs’ wolf ancestors.

years, Dr. Heaney says. The prevalence in dogs and cats ranges from one in 100 to one in 500, according to Merck, and while only 50 percent of dogs used to survive the first 60 days after diagnosis, today dogs receiving proper treatment have the same expected lifespan as non-diabetic dogs of the same age and gender.

Phasing Out a Pesticide

The Environmental Protection Agency and two pet product companies have agreed to phase out the neurotoxin propoxur in flea collars because of its health risk to children. Sergeant’s Pet Care Products Inc. and Wellmark International will manufacture pet collars using the chemical until April 1, 2015, and distribute them for one year. The collars are sold under the trade names Bansect, Sentry, Zodiac and Biospot, among others.

An EPA assessment of propoxur in pet collars last year, following a petition from the independent Natural Resources Defense Council, indicated risks to children who may ingest pesticide residues when they touch a treated animal and then put their hands in their mouth. Pets, however, aren’t at risk, the EPA says: “If you decide to use propoxur pet collars, follow the label instructions carefully and your pet should be fine.” ♦

Say the Magic Words — Road Trip!

Simple travel tactics can help keep them safe and generally stress-free

If you're taking your dog or dogs on vacation this summer, you'll be in pet-loving company. Thirty-two percent of owners take their dogs with them when they travel two nights or more — double the number from a decade ago, according to the American Pet Products Association.

With 46 million households in the U.S. owning at least one dog, that's more than 14.7 million dogs on the road, hopefully all of them crated. That's the most important travel recommendation from Gretchen L. Schoeffler, DVM, a specialist in emergency and critical care at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

"Dogs should always be crated when traveling — preferably a crate that is buckled in. It is simply safer for everyone," says Dr. Schoeffler, section chief of the Emergency and Critical Care Service. In an accident, your dog can become a projectile, injuring himself and others.

No Lap Dogs. Owners who drive with their dogs on their laps? "This is a distraction, and distraction is one of the most common causes of car accidents," says Dr. Schoeffler. And as much as dogs seem to love riding with their head out the window? "Absolutely not," she says. "If there is an accident or the driver has to make a sudden stop, catastrophic injury or death may result. Additionally, with the head out the window, dogs are at great risk for injury to the eyes as well as inhaling foreign material."

You may have to condition your dog to the crate if it's new to him. Begin by leaving it open and giving him treats inside for brief periods. Close the door when he's comfortable, gradually increasing the time inside over several weeks. Include bedding and water for his comfort. When you're ready to leave on your trip, be sure he's been well exercised



A securely buckled crate can help prevent injuries to dog, driver and passengers.

before entering the crate, Dr. Schoeffler says. "He'll be more inclined to rest."

Other recommendations for safety and well-being on the road:

To Treat Car Sickness

"Consider withholding food from a healthy dog for eight hours prior to and during actual travel time," Dr. Schoeffler says. "An empty stomach may help reduce nausea. If it is a long trip, feed a snack during a break — not while the vehicle is moving." Consult with the veterinarian about withholding food from puppies or dogs with medical conditions.

Meclizine (*mek'li zeen*), marketed under several brand names, may be

THE MOST COMPELLING REASON FOR CRATING

In a sudden stop at 35 miles per hour, an unrestrained dog can be a dangerous projectile, says ASPCA science advisor Stephen Zawistowski, Ph.D.

Dog's Weight in Pounds	His Force in Pounds
25	776
50	1,435
80	2,394
150	4,321

given for motion sickness, but consult your dog's veterinarian before giving any medications or supplements — even OTC medications, Dr. Schoeffler says.

Many dogs enjoy car rides and new scenery and people, but if yours is prone to stress, VCA Animal Hospitals suggests providing a special toy he can have only during travel, adding a T-shirt or blanket with your scent to his carrier, or using a calming dog-appeasing pheromone, available in sprays or collars.

To Avoid Hyperthermia

"Heat stroke is usually the result of environment, such as a closed hot space or exertion resulting from seizures and extended exercise," Dr. Schoeffler says. "During travel, I worry most about leaving pets unattended, especially in a car."

When it's 75 degrees outside, it takes only 10 minutes for the temperature inside a vehicle to reach 94 degrees. Ten minutes later, the interior temperature can hit 104.

"If during exercise your pet seems reluctant, do not push him," Dr. Schoeffler says.

To Prevent Dehydration

"Pets should always have access to fresh water to prevent dehydration, or it should be offered very frequently, depending on temperature, humidity and the dog's condition," Dr. Schoeffler says.

To Manage Rest Stops

"When driving, it is recommended that drivers stop for 15 minutes every three hours. This seems reasonable for most healthy pets as well," Dr. Schoeffler says, adding that you could take food with you or get food to go, "Then stop at a rest area to eat while your pet gets a little exercise and you both get a break."

To Aid in Emergencies

In addition to obvious supplies such as wipes for dirty paws, consider the not-so-obvious: an ID tag with your name and home and cell phone numbers, a copy of your dog's medical records in the event he needs veterinary care and a photo of him in case he becomes lost. ♦

When Normal Yeast Goes Wild

An overabundance results in scratching and produces substances that irritate the skin, acting as an allergen

You won't see a glimpse of this culprit, but you'll see its work, the strong-scented fungal infection that causes a dog to scratch-scratch-scratch his ears or chew his paws to rawness. The tiny perpetrator: an overabundance of microscopic yeast.

More than 1,500 species of yeast exist, each playing specific roles from raising bread to brewing beer. One type, *Malassezia*, lives on your dog's skin and your skin, too. You'll never notice it until the usually good *Malassezia* go wild, leading to itchiness and chewing of a magnitude requiring a visit to the veterinarian.

"Yeasts are a part of the normal flora of the body," says dermatologist William H. Miller, VMD, medical director of the Companion Animal Hospital at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "They help prevent, or slow down, the colonization of the skin by pathogenic fungi or bacteria."

Changing Ecology. "Malassezia is a normal inhabitant of the skin and ear canal. If something changes in the ecology of the skin/ear surface, the yeasts can start to multiply. As they grow, they produce various substances that can irritate the skin and act as an allergen."

Some people say the oily or waxy substances smell like bread, beer or cheese. Their properties help sustain the warm, damp conditions in which yeasts proliferate. Dogs with excessive skin folds such as the brachycephalic, or flat-nosed, breeds like Bulldogs and Pugs, and dogs with floppy ears, such as Basset Hounds, are at increased risk. However, dogs with allergies are believed to be most susceptible.

Other symptoms of yeast overgrowth include scabs around the ear from scratching, red or crusty skin, hair loss and behavioral changes, such as shaking or tilting the head, walking in circles and scooting an itchy rear across the carpet or lawn.

A veterinarian can uncover the reason for the symptoms. Among possible causes:

- ◆ Steroid medication prescribed for allergies. While reducing the overactive immune response to allergens, steroids can inhibit the skin's defense systems that keep the yeast in check.
- ◆ Antibiotics that are used to treat skin infections caused by allergies. They kill good bacteria with the bad.
- ◆ A foreign object trapped in the ear.
- ◆ Water trapped in the ear canal.
- ◆ A growth in the ear canal.

Diagnosis and treatment of the infection are uncomplicated. First the veterinarian will look into your dog's ears with an otoscope, much as a doctor examines human ears. "Usually a smear is made and the yeast are looked for

under a microscope," Dr. Miller says. "If they are seen, a topical product may be all that is needed. In more chronic cases, an anti-yeast medication — topical or pill — is added to the topical agent."

The medication may be an ointment or cream containing the anti-fungal agents miconazole or ketoconazole. Treatment can take some time. "Most significant infections take 30 days or so of treatment," Dr. Miller says. "Chronic cases can take months."

Iffy Home Fixes. Home remedies for skin and ear infections in pets are available. In most cases, Dr. Miller says, "They are OK as long as they aren't too crazy. Burnt motor oil is out there — would you put that in your ear? A solution of vinegar and water (25:75 percent) works in many cases. If it doesn't, a visit to your veterinarian is your next best step."

Dogs with food allergies may require special attention. Despite the growth in anti-allergy dog foods on the market today, he says. "I doubt that allergies are more common. I believe it's just diagnosed more often now."

If your dog has allergies, the diet-yeast link is all a matter of balance. Whether the dog is allergic to protein or grain, the goal is to feed a good diet that nourishes him yet supports the immune system without causing yeast to bloom. A veterinary nutritionist can help.

For most dogs, the yeast are a friend and not a foe and require no special attention. If the dog is prone to yeast infections, prevention is as straightforward as diagnosis. Carefully dry your dog's ears and paws, including between the toes, after he's bathed, or swims or walks through puddles. Ask your groomer to trim hair around the opening to the ear canal. Most important, keep an eye — and nostril — alert for signs that excessive *Malassezia* has taken up residence. ♦



A yeast infection of the skin like the one on this dog's paw often signals an underlying condition.

DR. WILLIAM H. MILLER

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

is the first to document such findings. Joining Dr. Kraus in the research were veterinary colleagues oncologist Kenneth Rassnick, nutritionist Joseph J. Wakshlag and cardiologist Anna Gelzer.

Between January 2009 and June 2010, the researchers analyzed 31 dogs with congestive heart failure: 20 had chronic valvular disease and 11 had dilated cardiomyopathy. All dogs were older than 5 years of age and had X-ray evidence of fluid in their lungs — pulmonary edema, confirming presence of CHF — within three months of entering the study.

Age, sex and body condition were not statistically different between the heart failure and control dogs, but the dogs with congestive heart failure had significantly lower levels of vitamin D in the bloodstream. All dogs were patients of the Cornell University Hospital for Animals and their medical care required collection of blood samples, which provided vitamin D levels simultaneously. They were enrolled in the study with client consent.

Breeds included Golden Retrievers, Doberman Pinschers, Dachshund mixes, Labrador Retrievers, Mastiffs, Rhodesian Ridgebacks, Cocker Spaniels, Chihuahuas, Great Danes, Basset Hounds, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Malteses, Fox Terriers, Newfoundlands,



BETTY LIDDICK

Commercial dog food has a robust supplementation of vitamin D, says nutritionist Joseph A. Wakshlag, DVM, Ph.D., at Cornell. However, because most home-prepared diets are deficient in the vitamin, he recommends supplementing them.

Bichon Frises, Lhasa Apsos, Beagles and Shetland Sheepdogs. A heart disease-free group of 51 dogs of various breeds served as controls.

Lack Sunlight Exposure. It is not yet known if vitamin D deficiency is related to diet or other factors. Besides obtaining the vitamin from food or supplements, humans can synthesize it through exposure to sunlight — this vitamin has been called the “sunshine vitamin.” Dogs don’t have the ability to synthesize the

sunshine vitamin and must rely solely on diet to provide adequate amounts. Vitamin D is fat-soluble, meaning it can be stored in body fat, which could potentially reduce the levels of the substance found in the circulating blood.

Owners were asked to complete a questionnaire on their dogs’ diet for enrollment in the study. Because the dogs’ dietary intake was not controlled and the dog foods were not analyzed for vitamin D levels, the actual vitamin D intake of each dog was an estimate.

The next phase of the study will involve supplementing dogs with CHF with vitamin D in addition to conventional heart failure medications. “Perhaps supplementing with vitamin D in dogs with congestive heart failure in addition to conventional therapy may increase survival time in this population of patients,” Dr. Kraus says.

Until those results are available, he does not recommend giving additional vitamin D to dogs with CHF — nor to healthy dogs — noting excessive amounts can cause a condition called hypercalcemia.

“Hypercalcemia can cause an array of clinical signs,” Dr. Kraus says. “Depending on the overall level, these range from lethargy, decreased appetite, kidney failure and, in severe cases, even death.”

Dr. Wakshlag, associate professor of clinical nutrition and section chief at Cornell, points out that dogs have two to three times more vitamin D in their blood than humans because of its robust supplementation in commercial dog foods. “I don’t feel there is any need for supplementation since very few studies have shown supplementation to be necessary even in disease unless levels are very low. Although levels appear lower in dogs with heart failure and also certain cancers, most levels measured were still within the normal range for dogs, so a definite need for supplementation has not been identified.”

He adds that the lower levels of vitamin D found in dogs with CHF may suggest that some element of the disease causes a lower concentration of vitamin D in the circulating blood. ♦

SIGNS THAT WARRANT AN EXAM

Any dog can develop mitral valve insufficiency, also known as mitral valve disease or chronic valvular disease, but some breeds are especially prone to the condition. They include the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Miniature and Toy Poodle, Dachshund, Lhasa apso, Maltese and Chihuahua.

If your dog has been diagnosed with a heart murmur, he may have no problem for months or years, but it’s wise to schedule an exam with a veterinary cardiologist and be watchful for signs of congestive heart failure. They include:

- ◆ Coughing
- ◆ Difficulty breathing
- ◆ A resting respiratory rate of 40 or more breaths per minute
- ◆ Lethargy or weakness, especially after normal exercise
- ◆ A swollen or enlarged abdomen
- ◆ A bluish tongue or gums
- ◆ Collapse or fainting

CATARACTS ... (continued from the cover) dogs. The leading causes of cataracts in dogs, however, are hereditary predisposition (see sidebar) and diabetes.

Seventy-five percent of dogs diagnosed with diabetes will develop cataracts within one year of their diagnosis, Dr. Eaton says. The cause is an enzyme called aldose reductase inhibitor. Diabetes causes high sugar levels in the blood that delivers nutrients to the eye. Excessive sugar in the lens can't be metabolized efficiently.

"This enzyme traps the sugar in the lens, causing fluid buildup and protein changes that lead to cataracts in dogs," Dr. Eaton says. "This is where collaboration between the general veterinarian and specialists is critical. Diabetes in dogs is increasingly prevalent, and cataracts are now one of the most common concerns if a dog is diagnosed with diabetes."

By comparison, adult cats rarely develop diabetes-induced cataracts. "It's a completely different story in cats," Dr. Eaton says. "We know that the aldose



Hereditary predisposition and diabetes are the leading causes of cataracts.

reductase inhibitor enzyme inside the lenses of adult cats is not as abundant as it is in adult dogs. So unless a cat develops diabetes when he is younger, we generally do not see diabetes-induced cataracts in cats."

Other causes of cataracts include inflammatory diseases of the eye like

uveitis, trauma to the eye (caused by a blunt or sharp object) as well as exposure to toxic substances, radiation or electric shock. Sometimes the cause of the cataract is not known.

Dr. Eaton urges dog owners to be alert for these subtle behavioral changes:

- ◆ Bumping into furniture, such as a recliner or sofa that has not been recently moved.
- ◆ Hesitating when using stairs, especially when descending.
- ◆ Seeming to suddenly forget the location of food and water bowls.

"Cataracts may not cause obvious vision impairment until they are advanced," Dr. Eaton says. "That's why we highly recommend that pets receive thorough physical examinations at least once a year and that those exams include assessing the health condition of the eyes."

During the exam, a veterinarian may use an ophthalmoscope (a light-affixed magnifying glass) to study the structure and health of all parts of the eye. It's common for a veterinarian to turn off the lights and use the scope to do an overall evaluation without any glare caused by room lighting. "Evaluations of the structures of the eye are best performed in a dimly lit room," Dr. Eaton says.

Thorough Exam. Various types of eye drops may be used during the examination, depending on the dog's age and health. To test eye pressure, a drop of topical anesthetic may be applied to numb the surface of the eye. A green dye called fluorescein stain may be used to identify ulcerations of the cornea and another drop may be applied to dilate the pupils. "This drop opens the pupil further to allow the veterinarian to look deep into the eye, the entirety of the lens and all the way back to the retina to make sure it is healthy," Dr. Eaton says.

(continued on bottom of page 7)

AMONG THE MOST VULNERABLE BREEDS

Determining the incidence of cataracts in dogs is complicated because factors such as breed, age and general health can all contribute to its development. One study estimated the incidence of cataracts in mixed breeds who are 7 to 15-plus years of age at 16 percent.

About 60 breeds are predisposed to cataracts, including some of the most popular:

- ◆ Poodles
- ◆ Silky Terriers
- ◆ Cocker Spaniels
- ◆ Boston Terriers
- ◆ Labrador Retrievers
- ◆ Golden Retrievers
- ◆ Miniature Schnauzers
- ◆ Siberian Huskies



Miniature Schnauzers are among the many breeds subject to cataracts.

Why Do They ... Sniff Each Other's Rears?

This occasional series explores the reasons for dogs' often intriguing behavior. If you would like to suggest a topic, please write CatWatch Editor, 800 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854, or email catwatcheditor@cornell.edu.

Two leashed dogs meet in the park, tails relaxed and down, a classic sign of friendliness. Inevitably, to their owners' embarrassment, the dogs' first move is to sniff each other's rears.

Some theorists suggest the behavior is the equivalent of our shaking hands, but given dogs' strong instincts and intelligence, surely something more complicated must be at work.

The dogs are indeed greeting each other — sometimes sniffing the ears, too — but they're also indulging in a form of communication, says

Pam Perry, DVM, Ph.D., a lecturer in animal behavior at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "Olfactory cues from the anal gland secretions, normally excreted with the feces, provide information regarding individual identity, sex, breeding status, age, social status, physical condition and emotional state."

Sniffing should be not punished, Dr. Perry says. "If owners find it too offensive, they should redirect their dogs by asking them to sit or to perform some other task and then rewarding them."

One caveat: Anal sacs vary in their bacterial flora. A study found behavior problems can result if one dog in a multi-dog home has an anal sac infection that results in a change of the secretions' chemical composition. The other dog or dogs might become aggressive toward him, say researchers in a report published in the journal *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*. They suggest that it's necessary to have dogs' anal sacs examined when social behavioral problems develop among dogs who previously lived together harmoniously. ♦

MEDICINE

CATARACTS ... (continued from page 6)

If cataracts are present, the most effective treatment is a procedure called phacoemulsification. It generally takes between 45 minutes to one hour per eye and is performed using general anesthesia. The affected lens is surgically removed, similar to procedures performed in people, and in most dogs an artificial lens is implanted.

The best surgical candidates are in good health with no evidence of any inflammatory conditions or diabetes. Before surgery, additional tests are conducted to make sure the retina is healthy and functioning properly. According to clinical studies, the surgical success rate in dogs is between 90 and 95 percent. "These dogs will have good vision long term," Dr. Eaton says. "The challenge comes in trying to determine if the patient fits in that 90th percentile. There should be no detection of inflammation in the eyes because the eye needs to be at a quiet state prior to surgery."

Vision generally shows improvement within a few days with full recovery, typically within six weeks. Immediately after surgery, patients

are fitted with a special cone-shaped collar to prevent pawing or rubbing at the eye or eyes. Clear collars let dogs see their surroundings better than the colored ones, Dr. Eaton says. Anti-inflammatory and antibiotic medications are commonly prescribed after surgery.

Regular Monitoring. If a dog is not a good candidate for surgery, the long-term plan calls for more regular veterinary examinations and assessments at least once or twice a year by

a veterinary ophthalmologist to monitor the cataract's progress and check for the presence of any other ocular condition.

"Cataracts over time become more dense which can lead to inflammation in the eye or uveitis, which requires prompt treatment," Dr. Eaton says. "We also want to continue monitoring for any abnormally high pressure (glaucoma) that can cause pain to the dog."

No medication is available to treat or prevent cataracts in dogs. Dr. Eaton cautions owners that over-the-counter oral nutritional supplements or topical eye drops claiming to correct canine cataracts are not effective. "We would love to have an effective topical medication, but there has been no good scientific evidence to prove these products will prevent or reverse cataracts."

In the end, you can play a pivotal role in the short and long-term health of your dog's eyes by examining his eyes monthly and reporting any changes in them or his behavior to his veterinarian. And be sure to include an ocular exam as part of his annual or semi-annual veterinary exam. ♦

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH CATARACTS

If your aging dog has cloudy eyes, it may not be cataracts. In fact, the more prevalent condition is called nuclear sclerosis. It causes the lens fibers to condense and harden, giving off a dull gray or bluish hue. Unlike cataracts, this condition requires no treatment and usually does not impair vision.



Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., here with her Cairn 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.

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 ...

DENTAL CARE
AT ANIMAL
SHELTERS



FEAR
AGGRESSION



FIRST AID
FOR BURNS



LIVING WITH
DIABETES

An Otherwise Happy Corgi Flees From Meal Preparation

Q One of our two Cardigan Corgis has a meal-preparation phobia. When anyone fixes a meal — breakfast, lunch, dinner or substantial snack — Meg goes out the dog door and stays in the fenced backyard until we are seated at the table.

Often she watches us through the glass doors and comes in when we sit down. When unable to go outside in bad weather, she sulks. We have no idea why Meg behaves this way. She's a friendly, happy 12-year-old, rarely upset by anything. We joke Meg is smart enough to understand when my wife occasionally says she's cute enough to eat but not smart enough to understand hyperbole. There's got to be a better explanation. Can you help?

A Meg certainly has a phobia — an irrational fear. When searching for the cause, we should examine all the senses: sight, hearing, touch and smell. Corgis are a very sensitive breed. We will probably never know why she developed this fear, but I have some hypotheses. The likely sense involved is hearing. I wonder if she has an Invisible Fence collar. I ask because the sound of a microwave beep sounds like the warning beep of the collar. Observe her when you make popcorn, or better yet set the timer and leave the kitchen, so you can observe her.

If her tail and ears go down or she flees though the dog door, you will have confirmed that is the root of her fear. Another major auditory culprit is a smoke detector. With apologies to whoever does the cooking, meals sometimes get burned. I can't cook sausages without charring them, and my BLTs are usually Lettuce Tomato and Burned. The smoke and excited human voices may have frightened her initially, and now she avoids the room where it happened.

The sound of the smoke detector is very aversive to dogs. It is a loud, high-frequency sound. Now we may have two senses — olfaction (the smell

of burning food) and audition (the sound of the smoke alarm).

Touch is unlikely as a source of her fear, but I can envision her standing next to the counter as my dog does, hoping for a bit of food to fall into her mouth, when instead the knife falls on her, scaring her and maybe even hurting her. Perhaps some boiling water spilled on her while the spaghetti was drained.

To solve this mystery, try to recreate the situation that frightened her piece by piece and notice when she becomes agitated. First, the cook walks into the kitchen and stands there five minutes. Does that disturb Meg? Next the cook picks up a pot and firmly puts the lid on, making a clatter. What does she do? Next the cook turns on the stove. If it is a gas stove, the odor and pop when the gas ignites may be scaring her. Try chopping some vegetables and watch Meg's reaction.

How does she feel about snacks? Does she leave the house when you get a dish of ice cream before bed? Does the number of people at a meal correlate with her fear? Does she stay outside when there are six people but not when there are two?

She may not be sulking when unable to leave. She is probably frightened. I bet her ears and tail are down, the whites of her eyes are showing, and she is licking her lips — all signs of fear and anxiety in dogs.

You can try to reduce her fear by progressive desensitization. If the reason is sound, you can record it and play it back to her at a very low volume in another room far from the kitchen. As the sound plays, give her small delicious treats, which she receives at no other time. If she eats happily and does not tuck her tail or flatten her ears, you can slowly begin to increase the volume. If that goes well, you can begin to move toward the kitchen. This will take weeks. If she will eat happily in the kitchen when the sound is playing at natural volume, she should be better during real meal preparation. Of course, if you have chosen the wrong stimulus, she will not be much better.

You are a very caring owner to be concerned about her emotional welfare. ❖

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