



Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine



DOG Watch

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

Vol. 20, No. 2 ♦ February 2016

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IN THE NEWS ...

A Decade in the Making: a Breakthrough for MD

University of Missouri researchers have successfully treated Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) in dogs with a common virus and predict human clinical trials will take place in two years. "This is the most common lethal muscle disease in boys, and there is currently no effective therapy," says Dongsheng Duan, Ph.D., who led the study.

Patients with DMD have a mutation that disrupts production of the protein dystrophin, leading to muscle degeneration and death. Affected boys lose their ability to walk and breathe. Dystrophin-deficient dogs have similar symptoms.

"Through previous research, we have developed a miniature version of a micro-dystrophin gene," Dr. Duan says. The minimized version protected the muscles of dystrophin-deficient mice, but it took 10 years for researchers to find a way to treat all muscles in diseased dogs. In the recent study, they injected a micro-dystrophin adeno-associated viral vector (organism) into the vein of juvenile diseased dogs. Treatment greatly improved dogs' condition. ♦

Why Dogs Hate Veterinary Visits

They fear the unexpected — the noise, the smells and being touched — but these six easy steps can help ease their anxiety

More than the expense and their reliance on the Internet, many owners delay taking their dog to the veterinarian because their pets dislike going.

Fifty-one percent said so in a survey by Bayer Veterinary Care. It's no news to owners whose dogs cower in the car in the clinic parking lot, pull mightily on leash and try to leap off the exam table. About that table: A small study published in the *Veterinary Journal* found that 78.5 percent



Many clinics forgo restraints to reduce their patients' stress.

See Recognizing Stress on Page 5.

of dogs are afraid of the table.

Bad Memories.

Several factors contribute to dogs' aversion to the veterinary clinic, says Leni K. Kaplan, MS, DVM, a lecturer in the Community Practice Service at Cornell University

College of Veterinary Medicine. "Pets are routine-oriented, and going to the vet, which most likely involves traveling in a car, is not part of their regular routine. They also may

(continued on page 4)

Anesthesia Today: Safer Than Ever

Don't be alarmed when it's necessary for a periodontal treatment such as teeth cleaning — complications are rare

You may be hard-pressed to find scientific studies about this, but anecdotal evidence abounds at veterinary clinics: When owners learn their dog needs a "dental cleaning," a lay term for periodontal treatment, or other forms of dental care, most of them are alarmed — specifically about the risks of anesthesia.

The reality today is that improvements in pain management, a wider variety of anesthetics and sophisticated monitoring have resulted in greater safety than ever. Most of the studies on canine mortality related to anesthesia indicate

the overall risk is less than 1 percent and much lower in healthy dogs.

Skilled Staff. "When administered by trained personnel, modern day general anesthesia is very safe in dogs and cats — much safer than many owners think," says Santiago Peralta, DVM, AVDC, Section Chief of Dental and Oral Surgery at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. Furthermore, age is not usually considered a significant risk in healthy dogs, Dr. Peralta says. "Systemically sick animals of any age

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DogWatch (ISSN: 1098-2639) is published monthly for \$39 per year by Belvoir Media Group, LLC, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713. Robert Englander, Chairman and CEO; Timothy H. Cole, Executive Vice President, Editorial Director; Philip L. Penny, Chief Operating Officer; Greg King, Executive Vice President, Marketing Director; Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial Officer; Tom Canfield, Vice President, Circulation. ©2016 Belvoir Media Group, LLC.

Postmaster: Send address corrections to DogWatch, P.O. Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535.

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SHORT TAKES

No Surprise: Our Dogs Are Equals in the Home

A survey of more than 10,000 pet owners in 11 countries — 3,100 of them in the U.S. — has found that American owners are especially lenient with their dogs and consider them equals in the household.

In addition to the U.S., the renovation and design firm Houzz asked registered users of its website about pets in the home in Canada, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Russia, Germany, Australia and Japan.

Among the results:

- ◆ While 8 percent of U.S. owners say their dogs rule the household, 59 percent say they share control. Elena Ambrosimova, an editor at Houzz Russia, was surprised by the showing that Russians (and Danes) at 4 percent were least likely to say so. "Every pet in Russia is pretty sure it's their house and they are the real owner," she says. "We are like maids for them."
- ◆ Forty-eight percent of owners in the U.S. give dogs free reign of furniture. One reason may be that, unlike owners in some countries, they haven't designated living areas especially for them; 75 percent of German owners provide a dining area for dogs versus 37 percent in the U.S. and 28 percent in Russia.
- ◆ Dogs are more likely to sleep in their owner's bed in the U.S. (41 percent), and least likely in Spain (14 percent). "In general, we are very concerned with our houses being clean," says Ana Martin Fiestas, who works in the Houzz office in Granada. "It might seem silly, but I don't think in other countries people clean as much as we do. When it comes to pets, they shed and dribble and have dirty paws, so I think it's not very hygienic to have them in our beds."



An international survey reveals that 41 percent of owners in the U.S. let their dogs sleep in bed with them.

Bigstock

- ◆ Twenty-two percent of U.S. owners spent \$1,000 on their dogs in the last two years.

Ownership has its downsides, of course: 70 percent of U.S. respondents cited fur and hair as their most significant complaint about pets while 43 percent cited tracking in dirt and mud. Owners were united, however, on the benefits pets provide. A majority — including 71 percent in France and 90 percent in the U.S. — say that pets make them happy.

Cornell to Study Raw Diets

The Food and Drug Administration has awarded Anil Thachil, BVSc, Ph.D., in the Department of Population Medicine and Diagnostic Sciences at Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine a grant to investigate the quality of commercial raw meat diets for pets.

Whether originating from the manufacturer or the FDA, recent recalls of raw meat diets that were suspected of bacterial contamination have included beef, chicken and jerky. "Some of these raw pet foods carry harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella*, *Listeria* and *Campylobacter* that cause disease in pets and people," says Dr. Thachil, director of the department's Bacteriology Laboratory at the Animal Health Diagnostic Center. "Our companion animals share our homes and activities, and they are an important part of our lives. We need to identify those disease agents in raw meat diets to safeguard both the public and our pets."

One of the goals of the diagnostic center involves ensuring the safety of foods of animal origin. ◆

When They Lose a Sense of Balance

Disorientation, drooling, darting eyes and tilting of the head can be signs of vestibular syndrome

Seeing your once agile dog suddenly stumbling, with his head tilted and eyes darting wildly, can be frightening. These signs are associated with vestibular syndrome, a fairly common problem with a variety of causes and occasionally only temporary signs.

Although the condition is sometimes congenital — present at birth — it more often results from infections, strokes, cancer, inflammatory or infectious disorders, toxicity from drugs or other sources and, less commonly in dogs, polyps.

Age a Factor. Some dogs are particularly susceptible. “We tend to see more vestibular issues among middle-aged or older animals, as cancer and strokes tend to affect them,” says Emma S. Davies, BVSc, MSc, ECVN, Senior Neurology Lecturer at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

“However, dogs can have ear infections at any time throughout their lives. Some older dogs may exhibit ‘old dog’ vestibular disease, characterized by head tilting for no obvious cause.”

CONNECTING THE EYES, EARS, BRAIN AND MUSCLES

The vestibular system consists of receptors within three fluid-filled, semi-circular canals deep in the skull. They connect via the vestibular nerves to vestibular nuclei in the brainstem, attached to the front of the spinal cord.

The receptors respond to changes in fluid movement within the ear canals as the dog’s head changes position. Corresponding signals are simultaneously sent to the brain and the muscles on the sides of the body that keep the dog upright.

Vestibular syndrome describes a problem with the balance system that causes dogs to lose orientation. “The dog’s nervous system is similar to the wiring in a cat,” Dr. Davies says. “For example if there’s an issue in the light circuit, the problem can occur anywhere in the circuit; however, what we see is that the lights do not work. By testing parts of the circuit, we can work out where the problem is.”

Some breeds are more susceptible than others. Particularly in small breeds, such as West Highland White Terriers, immune-mediated inflammatory disease affecting the brainstem can cause vestibular disorders. This may be life threatening and requires prompt treatment with veterinarian-prescribed anti-inflammatory medications.

“Brachiocephalic (flat-faced) breeds like Pugs and Boxers are also more prone to ear infections,” Dr. Davies says, “and Cavalier King Charles Spaniels are prone to a problem similar to ‘glue ear’ in children in which the middle ear fills with a sticky fluid instead of air. In dogs, the condition is called sterile otitis media with effusion, which can lead to secondary facial paralysis and vestibular disease.”

Signs of vestibular syndrome vary widely and may even be intermittent. “Often, all the symptoms start simultaneously,” Dr. Davies says. If the ears are affected, dogs may shake their heads or more rarely have a discharge from the ears. Otherwise, in addition to tilting the head, dogs may experience:

- ◆ Falling or stumbling to one side
- ◆ Flitting of the eyes
- ◆ Drooling
- ◆ Nausea
- ◆ Loss of appetite

Owners should take their dog to the veterinarian as soon as they see any of these symptoms. “Regardless of the



Emma S. Davies, BVSc, MSc, Cornell

While tilting the head can be temporary, in some cases dogs will exhibit residual tilting even after treatment.

cause, pets can benefit from anti-nausea medications. Affected animals feel terribly sick as a result of their lack of balance. I imagine it’s like being on an amusement park ride that whirls you around 10 times in a row,” Dr. Davies says.

A primary care veterinarian can examine the ear canal for signs of polyps or infection; however, these signs are not always visible. The owner may be referred to a veterinary neurologist, who would likely take CT or MRI images of the head.

“Even if an MRI is not affordable, a simple observation by a veterinary neurologist may give you some ideas about what’s going on with your pet,” says Dr. Davies. MRI images may reveal hidden polyps or provide additional clues, such as evidence of a stroke, which can result from lack of oxygen or a blood clot.

A spinal tap of cerebrospinal fluid under anesthesia might be the next diagnostic tool to reveal inflammatory cells or, more rarely, cancer cells.

Preventing Recurrence. Treatments can include ear flushes, antibiotics and supportive care, Dr. Davies says. “If an ear polyp or an abscess is causing the illness, then ear surgery can effectively remove the polyp or drain the abscess. And while strokes often resolve on their own, veterinary attention may prevent the animal from having another episode.”

(continued on the bottom of page 5)

VISITS... (continued from cover)

be unfamiliar with loud noises, such as barking dogs or vocalizing cats and strange odors in the air and on the floor of the clinic, and that translates into fear." It's also possible that they may have had a negative experience in a previous visit.

"Many pets are nervous, the way we are when we go to the doctor, because they are not sure what to expect, but most are not difficult to handle," Dr. Kaplan says. She believes owners are often more apprehensive about the visit than their pets. Thirty-eight percent of owners in the Bayer study said they became stressed just thinking about a vet visit.

If you're one of them, you can make visits stress-free for you and your dog with these tips.

1 Be positive. Dogs can sense our anxiety. "Perhaps owners worry about controlling the pet or that something painful will happen or he has a serious medical problem," says Debra Horwitz, DVM, ACVB, of Veterinary Behavior Consultations in St. Louis, Mo. "Either way, their unease may be transmitted to their pet, increasing pet anxiety as well. Remember, it is not necessarily problematic to be afraid of something new, especially if you then learn it can be a pleasant experience."

2 Train your dog to accept touching so he will be used to being examined, Dr. Horwitz says. Ideally, begin at an early age to introduce gentle handling of his body, head, feet, face and ears. Brush his teeth regularly so he accepts an examination of his mouth. Use food treats to make the experience pleasant. When the vet staff does an exam, he won't be as fearful.

3 Accustom your dog to riding in the car. Dr. Kaplan suggests starting with brief rides around the block, accompanied by your dog's

favorite toys and yummy treats. You can move on to longer rides as your dog becomes more relaxed. Be sure to use a restraint or crate to keep him safe. Crates also offer the added advantage of creating a comforting space where dogs feel secure. Dogs allowed to move around in the car



Accustom your dog to riding in the car or van if a trip to the clinic causes anxiety. Practice runs — short trips around the block accompanied by ample praise and treats — can help.

become a dangerous distraction for the driver. If your dog suffers from motion sickness, the veterinarian may prescribe medication as a treatment option.

4 Stage happy visits to the veterinary clinic. Occasionally call and ask to stop by for nothing other than treats and praise, Dr. Kaplan says. "The goal is to let the dog get accustomed to the smells, sounds and staff when he does not require veterinary attention." Owners should spend five to 15 minutes sitting quietly or reading while the dog relaxes.

Dr. Kaplan's staff does not always interact beyond medical care with a pet for

the first few visits until he has more confidence in his surroundings. "Later on, staff will deliver treats, hugs and maybe toys so the pet realizes that the vet office can be a fun place," she says. "This desensitizes and provides positive reinforcement regarding veterinary visits."

5 Try calming aids. Products that use dog-appeasing pheromones are available in a variety of applications. "These collars and sprays contain a synthetic copy of a natural comforting pheromone and have been shown to decrease stress and anxiety in dogs," Dr. Kaplan says. An over-the-counter anti-anxiety product called Zylkene, formulated with casein, a lactose-free protein in milk, was introduced in 2013. "Research suggests that it does improve stress and anxiety in some patients," Dr. Kaplan says. It's not appropriate for dogs who are allergic to dairy products, however.

6 Schedule an early appointment. If you have any reservations about taking your dog to the clinic, discuss your concerns so that the staff can prepare accordingly. "If we have a dog who is very stressed around other dogs, for example, we will make that pet a first appointment when no other pets are expected to be at the clinic to minimize the stress for the owner and pet," Dr. Kaplan says. "We can also escort them directly into an exam room instead of having them in the waiting room."

"Employing these simple steps can make veterinary visits relaxed and happy for everyone — and promote longer, healthier lives," Dr. Kaplan says. "It is such a great feeling when an appointment finishes and the owner is surprised but happy that everything went so well." ♦



Scientists believe yawning has several purposes, one being keeping human brains alert in times of stress. In dogs, it can be an expression of anxiety.

Managing Stress in a 'Culture of Kindness'

Recognition of the signs — both obvious and subtle — can lead to treatment in all but the most severe cases

Most of us easily recognize obvious signs of stress and anxiety in our dogs — pacing, excessive barking and hyperactivity resembling a fleet of drones. But we may not be aware of less obvious signs, such as yawning, shifting the legs and lowering the ears.

Those subtle signs are among nearly 40 behaviors that may require intervention, according to the American Animal Hospital Association's "2015 Canine and Feline Behavior Management Guidelines."

Cause of Euthanasia. "Behavioral problems affect more dogs and cats than any other medical condition and are one of the most common causes of euthanasia, relinquishment or abandonment of pets," the association says, adding that their management is essential in veterinary practice. It urges "a culture of kindness," avoiding the use of forced restraint.

The guidelines recommend behavior assessments — a standardized history —

be part of veterinary exams and medical records to identify and treat problems early in puppies' development. Among the typical stages they list:

- ◆ At 4 to 5 weeks, puppies will start to bark and then growl.
- ◆ At 5 weeks, they will recognize, seek out and interact with other species, including humans.
- ◆ At about 8½ weeks, they will be successful at house training.

While the guidelines are directed at professionals, pet owners will find extensive practical help and information. One example is the association's pointing out that patterns of behaviors are established early in development. "Veterinarians should advise clients during puppy and kitten visits that there is no evidence that pets 'grow out' of behavioral problems."

One reason that behavioral evaluations are especially important in young animals:

Studies show that 10 percent of puppies who were fearful during a physical exam at 8 weeks of age were also fearful at 18 months, according to the guidelines. "Patients do not outgrow pathologic fear."

Early separation from their littermates and mother before 8 weeks of age can be a source of behavior problems. Puppies separated before 8 weeks experience a greater incidence of problems, such as excessive barking, fearfulness on walks, reactivity to noises, toy or food possessiveness, attention-seeking behavior, and destructive behavior as adults.

The guidelines describe behavior modifications such as desensitization and counterconditioning. Professionals who can help and a host of other topics may be found at aaha.org/professional/resources/behavior2015. ♦

BALANCE... (continued from page 3)

Some dogs may occasionally exhibit residual head tilting after treatment, which may be permanent. "However, if the infection is resolved, they seem to compensate rapidly and do not show signs of distress from it," Dr. Davies says.

If the vestibular issue is the result of an ear disorder that can be surgically remediated, the outlook is usually favorable, but cancer can result in a more guarded prognosis.

There are many causes of vestibular syndrome, such as inflammatory disease and skin disease and research is being performed to understand these areas better, Dr. Davies says. Until more is known about the disorder, she advises owners to be alert to their dog's behavior. "At the first sign of

vestibular syndrome, seek veterinary attention. Once you know what's go-

THE VULNERABLE BREEDS

Breeds believed to be prone to vestibular syndrome include:

- ◆ Akitas
- ◆ Beagles
- ◆ Doberman Pinschers
- ◆ English Cocker Spaniels
- ◆ German Shepherd Dogs
- ◆ Smooth Fox Terriers
- ◆ Tibetan Terriers



Akitas are believed to be prone to vestibular syndrome.

ing on, you can better know how to treat it."

Dr. Davies has seen some dogs with the syndrome do very well. "I recently treated a 9-year-old Greyhound with sudden onset vestibular syndrome. The dog couldn't walk or even stand up, and had a bad head tilt."

Dr. Davies determined he had had a stroke. He received supportive care and rehabilitation. During his recovery, he was kept comfortable and safe even as he thrashed around trying to stand. "We administered fluids to maintain hydration and keep his brain well perfused [supplied with blood]. Within two days, he was still wobbly but on his feet. By the third day, he was well enough to go home." ♦

ANESTHESIA ... *(continued from cover)*

are always at higher anesthetic risk compared to healthy individuals. Some diseases represent a higher risk than others — for example, cardiac disease. In order to minimize or be able to anticipate and be better prepared for anesthetic complications, a complete physical examination and diagnostic tests as determined by the individual's medical history, physical examination findings and clinician's discretion, are performed prior to anesthesia. The result is that serious anesthetic complications rarely occur."

General anesthesia with breathing tubes has become the veterinary standard for dental procedures. The Ameri-

can Animal Hospital Association recommended it three years ago for dogs. Furthermore, Dr. Peralta points out that general anesthesia is vital to dental procedures because it provides these benefits:

- ◆ Protection of the airway with an endotracheal tube, reducing the risk of inhaling heavily contaminated solid and aerosolized particles produced during periodontal treatment.
- ◆ Use of instruments to probe and remove deposits under the gum line, which is essential in most dental procedures. It is precisely under the gum line where periodontal (gum) disease occurs.
- ◆ Ability to perform surgical interventions as indicated by probing and X-ray findings, such as extractions, biopsies and root canal treatments.

Regional blocks, which numb only areas that need surgery, continue to be a mainstay in dentistry. The procedure, in which the veterinarian injects a local anesthetic near a cluster of nerves, al-

lows the patient to recover from general anesthesia much more comfortably, while additional pain medications are administered as needed.

"The cost of administering regional blocks when indicated is minimal and is often times included in the charges for the procedure performed," Dr. Peralta says. "On the other hand, the cost of general anesthesia usually represents an important portion — about 30 to 40 percent — of the bill."

Regional blocks allow much lower doses of general anesthetics to be used, thus reducing the risk of side effects, Dr. Peralta says. "The most common complication when administering regional



Santiago Peralta, DVM, AVDC, Section Chief of Dental and Oral Surgery at Cornell, here with Sharon Harvey, LVT, VTS, takes X-rays of a patient.

SIGNS AND CONSEQUENCES

Lack of proper dental care can lead to serious health problems in dogs. Direct consequences of dental neglect include pain, inflammation of the gums, bone damage and tooth loss. Even worse, if left untreated, dental disease can lead to other severe health issues, including infections that can spread to other parts of the body. Be alert to these signs that your dog's teeth need veterinary attention:

- ◆ Bad breath
- ◆ Difficulty or refusal to eat
- ◆ Sudden weight loss
- ◆ Red or bleeding gums
- ◆ Blood on a chew toy
- ◆ Vocalizing when yawning or eating
- ◆ Loose teeth
- ◆ Lumps or bumps in the mouth
- ◆ Ropey or bloody saliva
- ◆ Head shyness (not wanting the head touched)
- ◆ Increased irritability or aggressiveness that can't be otherwise explained

THE BEST WAY TO AVOID DENTAL DISEASE: DAILY BRUSHING

Proper veterinary dental care is necessary to ensure your dog's health, but the most important steps begin at home. "The gold standard for the prevention of periodontal disease in dogs is daily tooth brushing," Dr. Peralta says. He adds that the dog's toothbrush should ideally have soft bristles, and a soft children's toothbrush is usually an excellent solution.

Specially flavored dog toothpastes are available. Human toothpastes should be avoided because any fluoride that might get swallowed can cause digestive problems or systemic toxicity if swallowed in large amounts. Dogs also usually dislike the flavor.

Some owners believe that chew toys are an effective substitution for brushing their pets' teeth. But Dr. Peralta says that chew toys and treats are, at best, an aid in terms of dental preventive care. "Many chew toys are available," he says. "Some are better, safer and more effective than others." He recommends that pet owners refer to the Veterinary Oral Health Council's website, www.vohc.org, which offers a list of products that have met the requirements for efficacy.

blocks consists of bruising at the injection site. This complication is minor and usually resolves spontaneously after a few hours or days."

More serious complications are very rare when administered by properly trained personnel, he says. These include accidental needle penetration of the eye while administering the block and the dog's injuring the tongue during recovery if it has been accidentally desensitized.

Health Assessment. In order to minimize the risk of periodontal disease, experts recommend daily tooth brushing, regular oral examinations and periodontal treatment when considered pertinent by the attending veterinarian. Periodontal treatment begins with an assessment to determine a dog's general health and is often followed by other diagnostic tests that may include blood and urine tests, chest X-rays and electrocardiography.

Before your dog undergoes anesthesia for dental care, ask the veterinarian about the type that will be used, how he will be monitored and who will administer the anesthesia.

When it's time for surgery, the dog will usually first be given a pre-anesthetic sedative and an injection for pain relief. The advantages of preemptive treatment include lowered stress on the patient, ease of handling and reduction of anesthesia.

After the tranquilizer takes effect, the veterinarian or anesthetist will place

an intravenous catheter into a vein in a front or hind limb, or occasionally in the neck. The catheter gives the veterinarian access to the patient's bloodstream to administer fluids and drugs during surgery. Fluids help to combat dehydration and a possible anesthesia-induced drop in blood pressure.

The veterinarian often begins general anesthesia by administering an injectable short-acting anesthetic agent. When the dog loses consciousness, a soft plastic endotracheal tube is inserted into the windpipe and connected to an anesthesia machine. The machine delivers an inhaled anesthetic mixed with oxygen.

Constant Monitoring. Continuous or intermittent doses of injectable agents or a combination of injectable and inhalant drugs can be used, depending on a patient's health and needs. Anesthetic monitoring devices attached



Age usually isn't a significant risk for healthy dogs undergoing anesthesia because of physical examinations and diagnostic tests conducted beforehand, says dentist Santiago Peralta, DVM.

to the dog help ensure his safety. "Monitoring typically includes continued measurement of body temperature, oxygen saturation, carbon dioxide concentration, electrocardiogram and blood pressure," Dr. Peralta says.

After the procedure, the dog slowly regains consciousness and is moved to a post-surgical area and monitored during recovery from the anesthesia. Dogs receiving routine periodontal treatment can usually be

discharged the same day.

The veterinarian will provide pain relief for dogs who have had tooth extractions or other invasive procedures. Options include oral or injectable medications, or transdermal patches that slowly release pain relief. Some dogs might be sent home with antibiotics to prevent or treat ongoing infection. A dog may be a little groggy but far healthier after receiving comprehensive dental care. ♦

THE PROBLEM WITH ANESTHESIA-FREE DENTISTRY

The standard of care in veterinary dentistry dictates that all canine dental procedures be performed under general anesthesia. Yet dog owners might still see groomers and pet stores offering "anesthesia-free dental cleanings." It is not recommended.

The American Veterinary Dental College cautions pet owners strongly against anesthesia-free dental cleanings. In such procedures, pets are not sedated, and the person (or people) performing the cleaning must physically restrain the animal to gain access to the animal's mouth — a process that can be traumatic.

Once the mouth is accessed, a sharp instrument is used to remove plaque and buildup from the visible part of the tooth. When completed, the outside surface of your pet's teeth might appear visibly cleaner or whiter. But the more than 60 percent of the tooth below the gum line has not been addressed, and that is where the bacteria that causes periodontal disease thrives.

In the end, an anesthesia-free dental cleaning might appear to be a cost-saving option compared to proper veterinary dental care. But ultimately, the underlying causes of true dental problems are not being addressed.

RESULTS OF ONE STUDY: LESS THAN 1% MORTALITY

Deaths due to anesthesia among dogs are rare. According to comprehensive research on anesthesia-related mortality in companion animals in the United Kingdom, approximately one in 2,000 healthy dogs die under anesthesia each year. The 2008 study evaluated more than 98,000 various procedures in which dogs were anesthetized and sedated.



Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., here with her West Highland White Terrier, Yuki, provided the answer on this page. Dr. Houpt is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus professor at 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 ...

LIVING WITH
ARTHRITIS



EMERGENCIES



PROBIOTICS



OILY HAIR
COATS

Charley the Beagle Mix Barks, Whines and Charms in Begging

Q I've been following advice in the newsletter about not letting treats take up more than 20 or even 10 percent of a dog's diet. Treats aren't my problem. I can control them. I feed a couple and put the package away. It's people food that my Beagle mix is after — especially any aromatic dishes I make. I cooked a nice ragoût the other evening, put out placemats, and when I went back into the dining room, Charley was sitting in a chair in front of one with his paws folded.

That's funny but his almost constant begging, whining and barking while I cook and my family eats isn't. He will sit under the table or beg at our side with those sweet eyes but, of course, one piece won't satisfy him. What can we do to stop his behavior and ours, too? We got him from a shelter where he had been turned in seriously underweight, so it's hard to get tough about this.

A Dear Gourmet Cook,
Charley sounds like a very nice dog. He was not up on the table ingesting the ragoût, but rather sitting politely. You are quite right that his early experience has shaped his present behavior. Many dogs undernourished as youngsters have a lifelong obsession with food. You did not mention what type of food he is currently being fed. It may not make a huge difference because your aromatic dishes smell better.

In addition, I am sure you serve a variety of dishes. We know that dogs like variety. If you feed a Beagle the same food for a few weeks and then offer him a choice between that food and another one, he will choose the novel one. Depending on the innate palatability of the food, he may continue to choose that food or gradually return to the original diet.

You can do a few things to ameliorate the situation. First, be sure he has his dinner before you do, so he will be satiated by the time you serve your meal. When trainers were telling us to be dominant over our dogs, we were instructed to feed the dog after we ate so the dog would know we were "dominant." Not only is the idea of dominance disputes between people and dog passé, but we now know that a dog is more likely to bite when he is hungry.

Feed him meals rather than free choice because he will be less hungry after a meal than after a snack. He will also be more willing to work for those treats. He should get treats, not for being a cute dog, but for doing something for you such as Sit or Down or Fetch My Slippers. During the meal he could be in another room or in his crate so he won't sit there making you feel guilty. If you do separate him at mealtimes, be sure he has something of his own to chew upon, a rawhide if he can tolerate those, a Kong stuffed with peanut butter or, if he is tubby now, popcorn and a little melted cheese.

The other plan you should implement is environmental enrichment. In this case, food puzzles. He can get half of his ration from puzzles. That will give him the intellectual stimulation of solving the puzzle as well as getting the food. There are food puzzles consisting of wooden trays with movable parts — hide a few kibbles under them. Charley will have to use his paws or his snout to open a compartment to find the food.

There is also a ball that he must roll in order for the kibble to fall out. Finally, there is the Busy Buddy Tug-a Jug, a diabolical puzzle consisting of a plastic bottle with food inside and a knotted rope that holds the food in until the dog manipulates it just right. I say diabolical because neither of my food-obsessed Cairn Terriers could master it.

I hope this helps and when may I come for dinner? ♦

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