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## A fat cat is not a happy cat

With money supply short and less to spend the days of the city 'fat cat' may be coming to an end! Obese cats are far too common and our favourite fat cat, reclining on the sofa as you read this article, may also have a short life expectancy.

Cats are living far longer now and with age comes many of the conditions associated with human ageing; arthritis, heart disease and diabetes. The problem is that obesity is both causing and aggravating these conditions. We then get the secondary problems of obesity, poor skin, constipation, fur balls, etc.

The answer is to keep your cat in shape - just like we should be doing ourselves! If your cat is over 5kg it may be obese. Our vets can discuss weight control and health issues with you and refer you to our nurse clinics, most of which are FOC, to encourage weight loss in your pet. Correct feeding, encouraging regular exercise and eliminating diseases that may cause obesity are all essential tools in managing the Fat Cat.



## Chocolate poisoning in dogs

Dogs are just like humans and love chocolate. The problem is that dogs tend to be smaller than humans but chocolate comes in human size quantities and dogs are far more susceptible to the potentially toxic substances in the chocolate.

Chocolate contains a group of substances called methylxanthines which in quantity cause toxicity problems. The two substances in this category which cause problems are theobromine and caffeine. We all know that caffeine can cause heart palpitations but theobromine in excess is toxic, with vomiting, diarrhoea, seizures and cardiac arrhythmias. Dogs often become dull, appear to have stomach ache and show shallow and fast breathing. As the condition deteriorates there are seizures

with cyanosis (a blue tongue) and heart failure. One of the first recognised cases was the death of a toy poodle in New York in the 1930s who ate a considerable quantity of cocoa powder.

The cocoa concentration in dark chocolate and specialist (Belgian style) chocolates tends to be higher than in milk chocolate. We do see cases of chocolate poisoning especially around Christmas and Easter. It is generally recognised that 1oz of milk chocolate per pound of dog weight is toxic but it can be as low as 1oz per 10lbs body weight for a high quality dark chocolate. In other words half a dozen chocolates could kill a small dog! Ingestion of large quantities of chocolate should be seen as a potential clinical emergency.



## My house, my toilet

In Simon's Cat's brilliant online animation 'Cat Man Do', (look it up on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)!) a hungry cat resorts to increasingly desperate and hilarious measures to wake it's sleeping owner. Many of you will recognise this behaviour in your cat! It is really the cat

in the family who rules us! However, your cat using your house as a toilet is a step too far. Urine is not an aroma anyone wants to come home to, but the problem of cats urinating or spraying indoors is common. Prompt action is needed to resolve this frustrating issue.

Cats spraying and urinating inappropriately are two very different problems. Spraying is essentially a behavioural issue, whilst inappropriate urination can be due to disease. If the latter is the case then you need to seek professional veterinary advice.

Spraying, however, is normal for cats. They need to identify with and feel secure in their environment which makes this problem difficult to resolve. Some steps you can take:

**Cleaning:** biological detergent, cold water rinse and alcohol based sprays

can remove all elements of the urine smell.

**Pheromone products:** available from your vet as sprays or plug-ins. These help both mask the smell and also reassure cats about their environment.

**Repellents:** From clear water bottles and covering objects in tin foil to small amounts of cat biscuits; several things can be trailed.

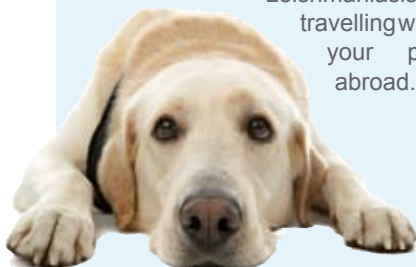
**Litter trays:** at least one litter tray per cat and another spare. If other cats are entering your house a Pet Porte cat flap could be considered as part of the solution.

Finally, if you are still struggling, it is worthwhile seeking veterinary advice and behavioural referral if the problem of spraying persists.

## Travel Topic: Leishmaniasis disease in dogs

This is caused by a microscopic parasite spread by sand fly bites. When bitten the parasite is deposited in the skin, often around the muzzle or ear and then invades the dog's cells. This is then spread to the internal organs and causes damage to the immune system. Signs of the disease are highly variable and in some cases may take several years to come to light.

Affected dogs may have a fever, show signs of hair loss, develop skin sores, nail disease and condition loss. In time, anaemia, arthritis, eye and kidney disease will develop. It can be fatal. Treatment is complex and often not fully curative so prevention against sand fly bites is best! Leishmaniasis can occur in any areas where southern sand flies live. Ask your vet for advice on how to prevent Leishmaniasis if travelling with your pet abroad.



## 10 top tips to keep your rabbit healthy and happy

- 1) Diet should be grass, dried grass or good quality hay as they need high levels of fibre for good digestive function.
- 2) Rabbits love fibrous leafy weeds and vegetables in small amounts – dandelion, groundsel, broccoli, carrots etc.
- 3) Rabbits don't need high levels of protein, fat or carbohydrates. An egg cup-full of proprietary rabbit food is needed each day.
- 4) Rabbits like to graze all day, so access to hay or grass is best. Constant chewing keeps teeth in good condition.

5) Rabbits need room to exercise. Hutches should be high enough for them to stand upright and at least three times as long. Access to a garden or an outside run is essential.

6) Clean the hutch regularly to reduce the risk of infection and parasites.

7) Rabbits need at least 6 hours sunlight a day, (important for teeth and bones) so they should be out in a run every day (weather permitting!).

8) Rabbits like company, and are best kept in pairs, although single 'house rabbits' do enjoy human company.

9) Teeth must be regularly checked. Bad teeth are the main reason for weight loss and ill health.

10) Use a spot-on to keep maggots away throughout warmer months and always check for fly eggs. Maggots can kill your rabbit within two days.



Picture by Evie Weeks