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No.3
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I've found time to look into the lives of our smaller furry friends - rabbits! Check out this issue's spread on bunny care, which includes tips on keeping rabbits cool in our tropical weather, diet and some common ailments. Speaking of care, we interview my groomer Desmond and his girlfriend Shi Min, a lovely couple who have devoted themselves to caring for animals. Desmond is a groomer while Shi Min works in animal welfare.

Lastly, since I spend so much time at Amber Vet, I thought it would be nice to show you what goes on when a pet checks in with us for a dental procedure – my master, Dr Brian Loon, really gives the best care possible from admission to discharge. So treasure the time you have with us pets, and make the most of every moment. Carpe diem!

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Carpe diem!
Cancer is a serious disease, and pet owners understandably feel grief, uncertainty, fear and hopelessness when their beloved pet is diagnosed with this dreaded “C.” Cancer appears to be increasingly prevalent, but no particular reason for this has been agreed upon, though diet, chemicals and environmental degradation are possible players. Other factors also include increased life expectancies with better care provided to pets, and improved diagnostic capabilities to detect cancer. As with the human disease, some cancers can be cured, and others managed to extend life and offer quality of life.

PREVENTION

While there are never any guarantees, pet owners can minimise the possibility of cancer by taking the following steps:

• Make sure your pet has good nutrition, effective weight management and plenty of exercise. A fit pet will have a wasp-like waist and a tucked-in abdomen.

• Feed your pet a high-quality diet made by a reputable company or a home-prepared diet prepared with the help of your veterinarian. Start with the amount of food recommended for your pet and adjust accordingly with how your pet’s body responds.

• Consider adding omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish oils and other sources) to potentially reduce the risk of developing cancer. Add regular exercise, and your pet will benefit with greater health and a closer, more vibrant relationship.

• Add regular exercise, and you and your pet will benefit with a better quality of life.

• If your pet has lighter skin or sparse hair, it is wise to limit exposure to the sun to reduce the chances of some skin cancers.

SYMPTOMS AND DIAGNOSIS

The following signs, while not definitive for cancer, should arouse suspicion about the possibility:

• Lumps and bumps, especially new ones and those that grow quickly

• Weight loss, sometimes despite a good appetite

• Lack of appetite

• Abdominal enlargement / pot-bellied appearance

• Weakness or lethargy

• Excessive panting or heavy breathing

• Chronic diarrhea and vomiting

• Blood in the urine or urinary incontinence

Diagnostic testing is the only reliable way to rule out cancer. Do make it clear to your veterinarian that you want diagnostic tests for conclusive evidence. The diagnosis of cancer is not an immediate death sentence but the chance to begin therapy.

TYPES OF CANCER

This is a listing of only the more common types of cancers:

• Skin tumours - these may be benign or malignant, and removal is usually surgical

• Breast tumours (mammary adenomas, adenocarcinomas) – spaying behind or second heat has statistically shown to greatly reduce the risk of breast cancer in dogs

• Bone cancer or osteosarcoma – most common in larger dog breeds

• Bladder cancer – more likely in older pets; watch for blood in the urine or straining to urinate

• Oral cancer - malignant melanoma is one of the most common forms

• Lymphoma - cancer of the immune system, most commonly affecting the lymph nodes

TREATMENTS

The forms of treatment available are surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy. These may be accompanied by nutritional and holistic therapies.

• Surgery (cut out the cancer) - This is the most conventional form of treatment, and sometimes cures a pet. Removing the cancer early can prevent it from uncontrollable spread. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy may also be used in combination with surgery to protect the pet from spread and recurrence of the cancer, or at least to slow its growth down.

• Chemotherapy (poisoning the cancer) – Chemotherapy is linked to many images of people losing their hair and feeling nauseous, but this often does not reflect the current state of chemotherapy treatment in pets. Chemotherapy simply means therapy with medication (rather than surgery or radiation). While a few cancers can be completely eliminated with chemotherapy, many cancers are put into long remissions following this treatment. One interesting fact is that chemotherapy has fewer side effects than radiation so, if your pet has to keep an open mind when deciding on chemotherapy. The aim of chemotherapy in pets is often used for palliative care to afford the pet a better quality of life, but not necessarily to cure it. Your veterinarian suggests chemotherapy as a treatment option, take some time to ask more questions and find out more about the pros and cons before making a decision.

• Radiation therapy (burning the cancer) – Radiation therapy utilises high-energy ionising radiation to kill cancer cells. Palliative radiation is also used to make pets more comfortable, and can shrink tumours that are inoperable, slowing down their growth and relieving pain. There is currently no known facility in Singapore for veterinary radiotherapy.

To find out more about diagnostic testing and available wellness plans, surf into http://ambervet.com/diagnostic.html/
THE ENVIRONMENT

A key requirement for a healthy house rabbit is, as with other pets, maintaining high standards of cleanliness. Remove soiled litter from its box daily, give it fresh water and food, sweep out any bunny berries and spilled food, and clean up any soiled spots in the cage. As most rabbits are possessive about their homes, do the cleaning when they are not inside. If they notice what you’re doing, they may even supervise the process! Give the cage, litter pan and dishes a thorough cleaning once a week, and once every month or two clean everything with a mixture of one part bleach to twelve parts water. Do not use strong household cleaners as the chemicals may harm your rabbit.

Rabbits prefer temperatures between 16-22 degrees Celsius and humidity of 30-70 percent. Warmer temperatures are actually dangerous, as rabbits are extremely susceptible to heat stroke. If you do not have air-conditioning you will need to take precautions, especially as Singapore’s humidity is also high. A few tips for keeping your rabbit cool on hot days:

1. Wet a towel and drape it partially over the cage.
2. Fill plastic bottles with water then freeze and place these in the cage.
3. Wet your fingers with icy water and gently stroke your rabbit’s ears. Their ears act as a temperature regulator so this can cool them off.
4. Watch your rabbit closely. If you see lethargic behaviour and rapid breathing or gasps for air, seek veterinary help as these can be signs of heat exhaustion.

The rabbit’s cage should be well-ventilated, but with no draft directly on the rabbit. Avoid cigarette smoke, fumes or excessive dust as these can lead to irritation of the respiratory tract and bacterial infections.

Rabbits are easily terrified – be sure to keep their area free of sudden noises and movements, and move them away if you are shifting large objects or furniture.

BUNNY BUDDIES

OUR FEATURE ON RABBIT CARE COVERS THE ESSENTIALS ON MAINTAINING FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS FOR YOUR BELOVED RABBITS

BASIC CARE

Rabbits should be groomed at least once a week, and daily during the times they molt. Bathing hastens the molting process and prevents them from consuming excessive hair. Trimming is another option for long-haired breeds.

Pet rabbits should be spayed or neutered upon reaching sexual maturity. This prevents litters of unwanted rabbits, and evidence shows it also helps to extend rabbit life, by preventing the onset of either uterine or testicular cancer. Uterine or womb cancer is particularly common in female rabbits and is a common cause of death by five to seven years of age.

Give your rabbit a chew toy made of approved wood or other rabbit-friendly material. This way, it will not damage or gnaw on things that could be harmful.

Rabbits should never be completely confined in cages as it leads to health and behavioural problems. Let your rabbit out of the cage to exercise for at least a couple of hours every day. Cardboard items make good toys. As they are creatures of habit, take them out at the same time every day. Any change to the routine is best introduced gradually. Rabbits are naturally sociable, so take the time to give your rabbit love and attention every day.

If your pet is allowed free access to your house you need to bunny-proof it. Block all escape routes, cover or block access to electrical and phone cords, cover furniture to protect it from the rabbit’s teeth and claws and remove access to toxic plants, animal bait, Insecticides, and other toxic items.

DIET

The rabbit’s diet is one of the most important aspects of its well-being, yet most pet rabbits are being fed a diet that causes many health problems.

Rabbits are meant to live on consuming large quantities of fresh hay and leaves, which provides the necessary fibre to maintain their gut health. The majority of their diet should consist of hay. Growing rabbits should be fed alfalfa hay, which provides extra protein and calcium needed for growth. Adult rabbits should avoid alfalfa as it can lead to gastrointestinal diseases and obesity. Instead, they should be fed grass hays such as Timothy hay or Orchard Grass hay.

Feeding green foods are also a great way to supplement your bunny’s diet. While green foods are an important part of a rabbit’s diet, they should never be fed as the sole diet source as they provide insufficient calories. Your bunny should only be fed greens once it is eating hay well. The greens should preferably be organic or free of pesticide residues that may be toxic, and they should be washed well prior to feeding. In general, the darker green the food is, the higher the nutritional value. Great examples include bok choy, broccoli (including the leaves), Chinese cabbage, Brussels sprouts, mustard greens, parsley and water cress. The maximum recommended feeding amount is about 1 packed cup per 1kg of ideal bodyweight per day. This can be divided into smaller meals.

Fruits and non-green vegetables, such as carrots, apples, berries and bean sprouts, should be fed in limited quantities. The recommended feeding amount is 1 tablespoon per 1kg of ideal bodyweight per day. They are a great alternative to commercial treats which can be rich in starch and fat. Bananas and grapes are not recommended as rabbits can become addicted to them at the expense of hay and greens.

Food high in starch and fat are forbidden as they cause severe gastrointestinal upset and obesity. Examples of foods to avoid include grains, bread, all beans, corn, nuts, oats, peas, seeds and wheat.

Rabbit pellets should consist of no more than 10-20% of a rabbit’s diet. When selecting a pellet look for the following:

- 18% or higher in fibre
- 2.5% or lower in fat
- 16% or less in protein
- 1.0 % or less in calcium
- Do not buy pellet mixes that also contain seeds, dried fruits or nuts.
- Buy pellets based on grass ( Timothy, orchard grass); avoid alfalfa hay in adult rabbits (your veterinarian can advise you if an alfalfa-based pellet is needed for ill animals where weight gain may be needed).

Feeding green foods is also a great way to supplement your bunny’s diet. Examples include bok choy, broccoli (including the leaves), Chinese cabbage, Brussels sprouts, mustard greens, parsley and water cress.

AILMENTS

Common health conditions seen in rabbits include:

- Ulcers is a slow-down of the intestinal tract and can occur due to an inappropriate diet, any source of pain or any other disease process that causes inappetence. The common symptoms are small droppings or no droppings, lethargy and loss of appetite. Keep the rabbit well hydrated and seek veterinary assistance immediately (definitely within 48 hours).
- Arthritis is usually present to some degree in older rabbits. The rabbit may move slowly and be in some pain. Try to make it’s environment comfortable. It may need help grooming itself and in consuming it’s cecotropes. See your veterinarian to assess the joints, and discuss options for pain-relief medications and lifestyle modifications.

Just as with dogs and cats, rabbits are pets for life – nurture them well and treasure their companionship!

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Merick, Leslie C. A House Rabbit Primer 2006. Santa Monica Press LLC, USA.
Brown, Susan, DVM. Rabbit Care. Small Mammal Health Series. 2009

06

07
1. **Tell Us About How You Came to Be a Pet Groomer?**

Desmond started when his pet dog, Chocolate, suffered a bad experience at a groomer’s. He came back with filthy ears, badly clipped nails, and trimmed fur, and appeared tired and listless. When he shared this, others revealed similar stories from behind the closed doors of pet shops. He decided to pick up professional pet grooming to provide quality service that never compromises the well-being of their furry friends.

2. **It Appears You’ve Found Love Through Your Affection for Small Animals! Perhaps Shi Min Can Share a Story About Her Involvement in Animal Welfare?**

Shi Min suggests that love for animals and concern for their welfare is vital. She started to learn more about the covert systemic abuse of countless animals all over the world. She was researching online about dogs for his sake and chanced upon an undercover investigation video that shows the cruelty behind pet farms in Singapore. She started to learn more about the covert systemic abuse of countless animals all over the world. Shi Min dedicates herself to speak up for them whenever possible.

3. **What Does It Take to Be a Qualified Cat Groomer?**

Desmond has received proper professional training and is experienced with handling cats. Understanding a cat’s nature is vital too. A qualified cat groomer is able to advise owners on their feline’s grooming needs, recommend suitable grooming services and products as well as conduct the grooming in the most humane manner with the cat’s best interest in mind. Last but not least, patience is a key quality all groomers should possess.

4. **Could You Share Interesting Anecdotes from Your Work with Pets?**

Desmond shares that the most rewarding part of his work is witnessing the heartwarming transformation of rescued dogs. Ricotta is a rescued mongrel who was found chained to a lamppost. He did not trust humans and would scream at the slightest touch. Despite his behaviour, Ricotta’s rescuer (who is now his adopter) gave him a second chance. It was initially very difficult to handle and groom Ricotta as he reacted badly to being touched. Ricotta’s adopter and Desmond worked closely to rehabilitate him, and Ricotta has gradually built a firm bond with his new family. Nowadays, he is much calmer during grooming.

5. **We Understand You Also Carry a Line of Environmentally Friendly Pet Products—Tell Us More?**

Desmond shares that their planet is facing serious environmental issues. All of us are responsible for the Earth’s health. They carry a quality range of eco-friendly grooming products and accessories, which include items made from sustainable sources and ingredients that are kinder to our environment.

6. **What Is the Process for Conducting a Grooming Session?**

Bathing

To ensure that your dog associates positively with water, bathing should be introduced to a puppy patiently and properly. At home, you may start by bringing your puppy together with some of its favourite waterproof toys and delicious treats to the bath. When your puppy is relaxed, reward and praise him so that he associates positively and stays calm during baths. Start with wetting his feet, then the legs, back and finally the head. Avoid getting water into the puppy’s nose.

Ear-Cleaning

For the ears, touch both the outside and inside with clean fingers frequently to simulate ear-cleaning for your puppy. During the grooming session, if ear hair removal is required, remind the groomer to pluck gently and only do a bit at a time to minimise discomfort.

Nail Clipping

To make nail trimming a stress-free experience, you could start by touching and handling your puppy’s paws frequently at home to let him get used to the sensation before commencing any actual trimming. Tell your groomer not to clip too close to the blood vein on the first grooming session as puppies who are more sensitive will feel discomfort and subsequently grow fearful towards the process.

To find out more about Desmond’s grooming service, surf into www.bubbly-petz.com or call 96563786.
InciDENTAL steps
FROM ADMISSION TO DISCHARGE, WE TAKE YOU BEHIND THE SCENES OF A DENTAL PROCEDURE AT AMBER VET

1 ADMISSION
As general anaesthesia is required for all dental procedures, a thorough pre-procedure health assessment of your pet must always be done. This involves a history-taking consultation with the owner and a full physical examination. Based on these findings, further diagnostic testing such as blood tests for kidney and liver functions may be recommended. These organs are usually checked prior to anaesthesia as they help to clear the anaesthetic and other drugs from the body. The veterinarian will also discuss details of the anaesthetic and dental procedure and attend to any questions that the pet owner may have.

2 PREPARATION OF EQUIPMENT
All dental equipment is disinfected or sterilised, and checked to ensure that they are in perfect working order.

3 PREPARATION OF PET
An intravenous catheter is placed on the leg. This allows antibiotic, pain relief and sedative/anaesthetic injections to be given, as well as administration of an intravenous drip to maintain hydration and blood pressure. The catheter also acts as an immediate access to the vein for giving medications in the rare event of an emergency.

4 ANAESTHESIA
An anaesthetic induction injection is then given to provide initial short term anaesthesia so that a breathing tube can be placed down the airway. This tube provides oxygen and maintenance anaesthetic gas, and also secures the airway so that water and other debris from the dental procedure does not get aspirated into the lungs. The amount of anaesthetic gas delivered is carefully regulated throughout the procedure.

5 ANAESTHESIA MONITORING
The most important aspect of a successful and safe anaesthetic procedure is monitoring. The pet is connected to a machine that monitors its heart rate and rhythm (ECG), blood pressure, oxygen saturation in the blood, carbon dioxide levels in the breath, respiratory rate and core body temperature. These vital signs are interpreted by a trained veterinary nurse or technician, who also monitors the anaesthetic depth of the pet to ensure that the anaesthesia is not too light nor deep, and reports all these findings to the veterinarian every five minutes, sounding the alert if anything needs attention. The veterinarian concentrates on the dental procedure while prioritising the pet’s safety under anaesthesia. All veterinary nurses and technicians have undergone rigorous training and are well-versed in reading the vital signs of animals and understand typical anaesthetic drugs.

6 DENTAL SCALING
The teeth are scaled using a high-speed ultrasonic dental scaler. This is similar to those used by dentists, allowing accumulated tartar and calculus to be removed from the tooth’s surface and under the gum line. Specialised hand instruments are sometimes employed to remove tartar stuck in grooves and hard-to-reach areas.

7 THOROUGH ORAL EXAMINATION
Once the teeth are cleansed, a thorough examination is performed with special probes and other instruments to check for any pockets beneath the gum line that may indicate tooth decay, as well as any signs of teeth that may be internally infected, decayed or chipped. The rest of the mouth is also examined for signs of disease such as ulcers or masses on gums.

8 TEETH EXTRACTIONS
Bad teeth usually need to be extracted, as leaving them untreated can result in continuing decay, infection and pain. While endodontic procedures such as root canal therapy can be done for pets, they usually require intensive long-term care by the owner to maintain the teeth, and these procedures should only be done by specialist veterinary dentists. As such, bad teeth are best extracted to prevent further long-term health complications.

Prior to extraction, a local anaesthetic solution is injected. This ensures that the pet stays comfortable throughout the extraction process, while the general anaesthetic gas can be kept as low as possible.

Steps for tooth extraction:
• An incision is made with a blade around the gum line to free gum tissue from tooth
• For single-rooted teeth, the tooth is elevated with hand elevators to loosen the root from the socket before removal
• For premolars and molars with two to three roots per tooth, a special high-speed burr is used to carefully divide the tooth into sections such that each section contains one root before it is elevated
• A round burr may also be used to cut into the socket to expose the root for elevation
• A new burr tip is used for each pet to ensure hygiene and sharpness, as a blunt burr can cause more damage to tissues
• The sockets of extracted teeth are flushed with a disinfecting solution

9 DENTAL POLISHING
The remaining teeth are polished with a polishing paste, similar to what we all do at our dentists. Polishing helps to smoothen the surfaces of the teeth so that plaque and tartar does not re-attach as easily thereafter, and also helps to remove mild staining. A new polishing head is used for each pet for hygiene purposes.

The mouth is sprayed clean with disinfectant solution before the pet is recovered from anaesthesia. Pain relief medications are administered again if necessary.

10 RECOVERY
The nurse monitoring the anaesthetic procedure will continue to monitor the pet for at least two hours post-procedure to ensure that it recovers safely before going home.

11 DISCHARGE FROM CLINIC
The veterinarian overviews the procedure done with the pet owner and gives home care advice. If teeth are extracted, a review appointment is usually recommended one week later to ensure that the extraction sites have healed well.

Do discuss the above steps with your veterinarian. Your pet’s safety and well-being during dental procedures is of utmost importance.
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