

Medical Notes

InTown Veterinary Group is dedicated to providing clients with an unparalleled range of veterinary care options.

The doctors at Bulger Animal Hospital & Essex County Veterinary Referral Hospital are always on hand no matter how seemingly small the question. We care about you and your pets. If you're worried, call us.

Bulger Animal Hospital:

247 Chickering Road,
N. Andover, MA 01845

Phone:
(978) 682-9905

24-Hr Emergency:
(978) 725-5544

www.InTownBulger.com

Toxins Update

By Lindsay Renzullo, DVM

One of the challenges that every pet owner faces is the possibility that their furry companion will consume something other than their own food. There are many common toxins easily found in an average home that can cause serious illness and even death for some animals if consumed. Some of these toxins are well-known (chocolate and antifreeze) but others are not as mainstream and can be equally harmful. You may already know this, but it can never be stated enough: please remember to bring the label/container/a sample with you to the emergency room if you suspect your pet has ingested something toxic. Knowing what your pet has consumed may save the veterinarians on duty (and your pet) valuable minutes.

Here are a few of the toxins you might not have heard about:

Sugarless gum: This sweet treat for humans can be very harmful to dogs when ingested. It can cause hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) that may lead to seizures/coma or an acute liver failure. As few as 1-2 pieces of sugarless gum can cause these clinical signs. If you notice your dog ingesting gum or any sugar-free candy please call immediately. The toxic compound is **Xylitol** and not all sugarless gums and candies contain it, so make sure to check (and bring) the label to the hospital if you suspect this was the culprit. There is no antidote for this toxin, but detoxification and proper supportive care can make a difference in recovery.



Grapes and Raisins: You may not have heard through the grapevine, but grape and raisin toxicity is nothing to joke about. Ingestion of either can cause vomiting, kidney failure and ultimately, death. The toxic compound and relative amount linked to grape and raisin intoxication has yet to be identified. If your pet ingests either grapes or raisins it is important to call a veterinarian immediately so your pet can receive proper supportive care to help save their lives.

For more information on grape toxicity, go to the [January 2010 Muddy Creek Newsletter](#), article: "The Grapes of Wrath."

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For more information, feel free to use the medical index on our website. www.InTownBulger.com, then click "Medical Index".

Kitty Corner

Introducing A New Cat or Kitten to your Other Pets (Part I - Cats)

By Kathryn Wrubel, Ph.D.

Proper introduction of a new cat to your household pets can prevent a myriad of behavior issues in the future. If not done properly, problems such as inter-cat aggression, predatory aggression, fearfulness, anxiety, and bullying can result. Cats can take a while to warm up to new surroundings and it is best to take this process slowly. Rushing into it when your cat or other pets are not comfortable yet can be asking for trouble.

Below is part one of a two part article. Part two will focus on introducing your new cat or kitten to a dog. In this edition we will focus on introducing your new cat to other household cats.

Planning Ahead

Picking the Right Cat for Your Household:

It is best to pick out a cat that you know will fit in well with your family and existing pets. You want all of your pets to have a good quality of life and to live as harmoniously as possible. If you have a dog that kills small animals and shows interest in cats that worries you (staring, stiffening, and other predatory behaviors), it isn't fair to introduce a cat to your household. If you are already in this situation, be prepared for a lifetime of avoidance, management and control measures to keep your cat safe. Your cat should never be left unsupervised with a predatory dog. If you have a cat that doesn't like other cats or has a history of fighting with them in the house, you may just be in for more of the same. Finally, if your resident cats or dogs have behavior issues that could interfere with the addition of a new cat or that require time-consuming fixes you should seriously consider attending to these issues prior to adopting a new cat.

Figure out what feline temperament or personality will fit best into your home. Some breeds of cats are stereotypically more bold, playful, laid-back, or affectionate. More information about cat breeds can be found at:

<http://animal.discovery.com/breedselector/catselectorin dex.do> or www.catster.com/breeds.



When you meet a kitten or cat for the first time pay attention to their behavior.

- Are they gregarious, outgoing, playful, or jovial? Some resident cats and dogs will benefit from an occasional swat, hiss or vocalization and will do best with a new family member who can stand their ground occasionally.
- Are they more standoffish compared to their littermates? Are they fearful, skittish, shy, or hiding? If you suspect that your existing cat or dog will have a field day terrorizing the little guy- even if you feel sorry for them and that mommy/daddy instinct is kicking in- this is not the cat for you.

You know your pets, so use this information to your advantage when picking out a new feline family member.

If you are getting a new kitten it is best to socialize them with your other pets when they are between 6-8 weeks of age (they are more open to new things during this time period of rapid learning and socialization). If you are adopting an adult cat it is a good idea to adopt a cat that has lived previously

with other cats or dogs instead of a cat from a previous home with no other dogs or cats.

Make sure to take your new cat to the veterinarian prior to bringing them home for medical tests, deworming, and vaccinations. You don't want to double or triple your medical bill by skipping this step.

Introductions

1. Your New Cat's First Few Days: Provide a comfortable closed room for your cat to spend their first few days in. It should have food and water dishes, comfortable resting spots, a new litter box, a scratching post, toys, and several hiding locations (cardboard boxes or tunnels made out of paper bags work great). The litter box should be on the other side of the room from the food and water dishes since cats don't like to eliminate where they eat.

Introducing A New Cat or Kitten

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When you arrive home with your new cat take him directly to this room in a carrier and open the door. If your cat is nervous and won't come out of the carrier, leave the room to give them time to adjust to their new surroundings. If your cat has a blanket or other item that smells like their previous home put that in the room with them to make them more comfortable. A lot of cats will hide when they first come to a new house. Don't force your new cat to come out or push them beyond their comfort zone. Just leave them be and be upbeat and calm when you visit them. Sit on the floor and see if they will come out to say hello for treats or petting. This time of separation will give them time to explore their new environment without the stress and interruption of your existing pets. You will also have some special alone time with your new cat so you can work on building a relationship with them. During this time your other pets may investigate the door area and you may hear some vocalizations. Make sure to keep your resident pets' schedule as close to normal as you can once your new cat arrives. Cats in particular are creatures of habit and if the new cat disrupts their routine, they will be paying attention.

After a couple of days, take items with your pets' odors to areas where they can be investigated by your other pets. A cat and dog's sense of smell is finely attuned and gives them a lot of useful information to go by. Try rubbing clean socks on the cheek of your cats or the body of your dog(s) and put the socks in the other rooms so your pets can familiarize themselves with each other.

2. Cat/Cat Introductions: Watch your cats to see how they behave around the socks/scented items to get a feel for how comfortable they are. Do this for several days. If after the first few days, your resident cats are not acting upset or unusual and the new cat seems to be out and about you can start with the next phase: switching territories. Since cats are territorial, if you don't switch territories, you will be establishing them in the home.

Make sure your pets are locked up during the territory switch so they don't interact yet. Since cats are territorial it is important that all of your cats' smells are spread out throughout your home and they can explore freely without the real or anticipated interference of the other cat(s) in the home. This will give them a chance to familiarize themselves with each other's scents and make them more comfortable when it comes time to share spaces. Let the new cat leave the room on their own while

the resident cat is closed in a room, carrier, or other area. Then once the new cat is safely in another room (preferably closed in) you can bring the resident cat(s) to their territory. It is best to introduce one cat at a time to the newcomer's room. Start with the cat you think will get along with the new cat best. In this case, put your other cats in a separate room or carrier where they won't see or interact with your new cat. Switch territories a couple of times a day.

During the next phase you should feed your new cat and your resident cats simultaneously near the door to the room your new cat resides in. This will cause them to associate each other with positive experiences and should take the focus off of concerns they have about each other as they focus on enjoying their meals. You can begin with the bowls at a comfortable distance from the door and gradually move them closer. Once your cats are on opposite sides of the door eating comfortably you can open the door a pinch so they can see each other while eating. Keep it open but don't allow the space to be big enough for them to push through (you can use a doorstop at first). Eventually you can put up a tall gate or screen to separate the cats at the door.

If this is progressing well you can open the door. Have treats for both cats on hand and toys to provide a distraction. Make sure the cats have hiding places to retreat to if they become scared. Only introduce one cat at a time to your new cat (in order of suspected difficulty). Do this for a brief time period and end on a positive note if possible. Do this for several sessions and gradually extend the time for exposure. If any of your cats become aggressive, hiss, or appear frightened, you should stop the introduction and go back a few steps. After the cats are getting along for long periods you need only put your new cat in their room at night or other times when you cannot supervise them. Once they are completely comfortable you can let them all have the run of the house.

If Things Go Badly (Cat/Cat Introductions): Always do your best to end introduction sessions on a positive note. In the case that you can't and/or a pet becomes very fearful or aggressive, separate the pets safely and go back a step or two. Do your best not to let things intensify. Progress slowly and don't force anything on your pets that they are not comfortable with. During introductions you should be calm and upbeat. Don't act upset, scared, worried, or angry around your pets as this might make them suspicious of each other.

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Your Reptile & You

What's all the Skink About?

By Lindsay Renzullo, DVM

Skinks are part of the most diverse group of lizards. The most common skink for household pets is the blue tongue skink. As the name indicates the blue tongue is used in the wild to warn off potential predators. Many types of skinks are ovoviviparous, meaning they give birth to live offspring.

Owning a Blue Tongue Skink

Housing: Blue skinks can grow 14-26 inches in total length and can live 15-20 years. Adults need to be kept in a large covered tank averaging 40-55 gallons. Substrate can be pine shavings (not cedar), aspen shavings or cypress mulch.

Since they are mainly ground dwellers, large branches or rocks for climbing are not required, but they should have at least one hide box in their enclosure. An area of slightly damp substrate should be provided, or as an alternative a humidity retreat box (a box they can freely climb in and out of, filled with damp sphagnum moss, for use during shed periods) should be provided.

Temperature: The overall temperature should range from the mid 70s to the mid 80s. A warmer basking area should be provided during the day with temperatures reaching the low 90s. In order to create a proper temperature gradient a heating pad can be placed under the tank at one end or alternatively a radiant heat source placed overhead.

Lights: UVB wavelengths should be provided. This can be furnished by close proximity to a Vita-Lite or Zoo Med Iguana fluorescent light or direct sunlight. If the latter is used, a cooler retreat should be available. They do not tolerate high temperatures well, and genuinely require the proper temperature gradients provided as stated above.

Diet: Blue tongues are omnivores, consuming both plant and animal matter. Their diet should be balanced with 60% plant and 40% animal. A mixed vegetable salad can be prepared and dandelions and escarole can be added to the salad. Skinks also love berries and juicy fruits!

For the animal portion of their meal, smaller hatchling skinks can be fed mealworms, redworms, small crickets, and pinkie mice and as they grow they can be offered earthworms. Try to avoid frozen vegetable mixes or corn, carrots, cauliflower and broccoli. These aren't especially good for skinks and can lead to a thiamin deficiency.

Skinks can be fed ad lib, that is, however much they want to eat, when they want to eat. Feeding frequency will taper off as they grow, so you may find that you are offering food 2 to 4 times a week. Blue-tongues are pretty expressive when they are hungry (they clearly fixate on your hands and any other perceived movement, often with their mouth open and body ready to charge or pounce), so they are unlikely to go hungry for long so long as you keep an eye on them. Fresh water should always be made available.



Blue Tongued Skink

photo courtesy of: www.reptilesweb.com

Is the Skink right for you?

Normally blue skinks are very docile and can be tamed easily. They will develop claws as they grow which they normally do not use for scratching but they can be startling when felt, so care must be taken when a small child or someone who

is nervous is handling them. Occasionally they will try to bite at fingers mistaken for potential prey.

Please make sure to wash hands before and after handling.

A blue-tongue skink can be a wonderful reptile friend for those looking to explore their exotic side!

Bulger Animal Hospital Presents:



Muffin - Our Featured Pet of the Quarter

Case summarized by Lindsay Renzullo, DVM

Muffin is a one-year old female guinea pig that presented to Bulger Animal Hospital on an Emergency visit. The owners noticed that one of Muffin's eyes seemed to be cloudy and potentially bleeding; being very concerned, they rushed her into the ER.

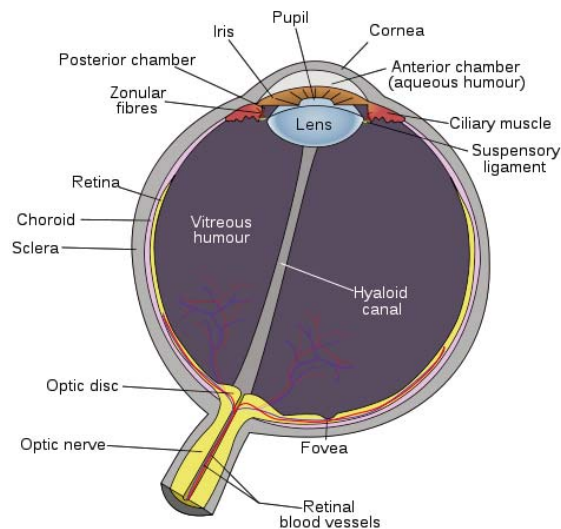
A thorough examination determined that Muffin had a very large and deep corneal ulcer.

The cornea is the clear, transparent surface of the eye. A corneal ulcer is a defect in that surface layer. The cornea is very sensitive and having a defect in it can cause intense pain. If you have ever had a small grain of sand or dust in your eye, you can appreciate the cornea's sensitivity. Ouch!

Corneal ulcers can occur for a variety of reasons, trauma being one of the most common. However there can be other causes such as chemical irritation from shampoos, chronic irritation from abnormal growth of eyelashes (known as distichia), and entropion (the rolling inward of eyelids) to name a few.

Identifying the cause of a corneal ulcer during your visit to the veterinarian is important both to treat appropriately and to potentially prevent a recurrence. Ulcers can not only be painful but they can be very dangerous as well. If an ulcer is left without medical treatment it can progress down through the entire cornea, finally rupturing the cornea completely. When this happens aqueous humor (the fluid found within the eye) is lost and the eye may never regain sight.

Muffin's ulcer, even though very large and deep for such a little guinea pig, received prompt medical treatment. It was suspected she had some form of trauma which had initially caused the ulcer. Muffin's owner understood the importance of treating Muffin and at her recheck appointment the ulcer had healed completely! Muffin is reported to be doing well and enjoying all her fresh veggies!



If you notice your pet having any abnormalities with their eyes it is important that you bring them in for an appointment. The ocular structures are very sensitive and if left without medical treatment serious problems can develop.

Pet Owner Lecture Series

Are you a pet owner with questions about your pet? If you are, perhaps you would be interested in signing up for one of our free upcoming one-hour pet owner lectures. Dates and times are listed below. Go to our website for more information and to register to attend. www.InTownVet.com/InTown/2009ClientEd.html

Upcoming topics include:

March 10, 2010: What You Need to Know About Dogs Now to Prevent Behavior Issues in the Future

This lecture will cover the basics on what your dog needs to thrive in the human world. Topics covered will include the basics on socialization, enrichment, exercise, training and leadership that every owner should know.



April 7, 2010: Frisky Felines, Scaredy Cats, & Cranky Kitties: Keeping the Peace in Multi-Cat Households

This lecture will go over the basics of what you need to know about cat behavior and managing multi-cat households. Beginning with introducing a new cat, and covering issues such as house soiling, intercat aggression, territorial marking, furniture scratching, and redirected aggression, this lecture will cover a myriad of feline behavior issues and tips will be provided on resolving them. Background measures such as enrichment and exercise will also be discussed.

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Note for New Kittens: If your new kitten is in the sensitive period for socialization (prior to 9 weeks of age) you may consider speeding up the introduction process if things are going well. During this time your kitten is like a little sponge and they can form lasting bonds with your other pets if they are willing partners. If you suspect your kitten may be injured by a large dog make sure to supervise them carefully together. Also, just because your kitten is comfortable doesn't mean your other pets are, so don't force this if your other pets aren't willing or able to progress that quickly.

For information on introducing your new cat or kitten to your dog, check out next quarter's Bulger newsletter! If you don't want to miss it, subscribe today to receive your electronic copy. You can unsubscribe at any time.

Toxins Update...continued from page 1

Onions, Garlic and Chives: These may seem like wonderful additions to any menu item for people, but in dogs and cats they can cause gastrointestinal irritation and even damage to the pet's red blood cells. This can cause a very harmful anemia which will not allow the animal's blood to provide nutrients to vital organs. Larger quantities of these foods normally is required to see toxic effects, however it is recommended not to give these foods to dogs or cats. Cats do seem much more sensitive to the toxic compound found in these foods so please call if a suspected ingestion has occurred.

There are many more toxic foods and plants of which, as pet owners, we need to be aware. The ASPCA provides a wonderful list on their website www.aspc.org of common household toxins and toxic plants. Always remember: if your pet ingests anything other than their normal food please call a veterinarian to ensure that they are safe!