

PETS mag

the lifestyle magazine for
pet owners

July 2014

The health issue
*Insights from
top vets*

**The pain of pet
bereavement**

News & views, expert
advice + top product
picks!



A boy's best friend

A loyal Labrador named Buddy, from Gillingham in Kent, has formed a unique and life-changing bond with Jacob, a 10-year-old boy with autism. But the relationship almost ended in tragedy when Buddy faced death after eating chocolate, which is toxic to dogs.

The heart-warming partnership dates back to July last year when Jacob's mum, Christine Steady, looked for a support dog to help her autistic son, who had difficulties socialising and communicating. Told there was a four-year-waiting list for a specially trained assistance dog, she decided to take matters into her own hands.

Christine said: "Jacob was very withdrawn, rarely laughed or engaged with us and spent much of his time in his room alone. It was heartbreaking. I knew each day we waited for an assistance dog was a day Jacob was missing out on so many

opportunities, so I decided to find a puppy myself. As Jacob asked for a 'yellow dog' I found a local litter of Golden Labradors. It would have been too overwhelming for Jacob to visit all the puppies together, so we arranged a video call and Jacob spotted Buddy sitting at the back by himself, something I think he immediately identified with.

"Jacob also loved Buddy's brown nose, so we invited the eight-week-old puppy into our home. I hoped the companionship would help Jacob, but I never could have guessed how much it would

transform his life – they are a perfect match! My son has so much more confidence now and he talks about Buddy all the time, which really helps him to socialise."

But the duo's incredible bond nearly ended in tragedy when, aged just eight months, Buddy got his paws on four Christmas selection boxes and gobbled the lot, leaving no trace of the chocolate treats, only the empty wrappers.

Knowing that chocolate can be poisonous for dogs, Christine took him straight to PDSA in Gillingham, where Buddy was



From L to R: Head Nurse Jennie Keen, Jacob, Buddy and Charlotte Dowset, Jacob's step-mum.

given emergency treatment. Head Vet Nurse, Jennie Keen, said: "Buddy had eaten a lot of chocolate, including two boxes of dark chocolate which contains a high level of theobromine, an ingredient which is toxic to many animals. It was touch and go and we really didn't know if Buddy would survive. All we could do was give him all the support and care possible to help him flush the toxin from his body, and hope that he

was strong enough to pull through."

When Jacob was told that Buddy was poorly, he was terribly upset and asked constantly how he was doing, and whether he could visit his pal, who had to stay in PDSA's care and under close observation.

It was a very difficult time for the family, but eventually two days later Buddy was out of danger and well enough to come home."

Christine added: "Jacob was overjoyed to have his playmate back but is now incredibly protective of Buddy, and Buddy is now extra protective of Jacob. If any food is dropped on the floor Jacob immediately picks it up to make sure Buddy doesn't eat anything he shouldn't, and he watches over him whenever he plays out in the garden.

"Buddy has given Jacob a reason to go outside, they love going

to the park and playing football or hide-and-seek in the woods.

Jacob also communicates so much more now because he wants to talk about Buddy, and it's given him more responsibility as it's his job to feed his dog. Buddy really has turned Jacob's life around in so many ways.■

Visit: www.pdsa.org.uk.

A TICKING TIME-BOMB: genetic disease in *Staffies*



By **Harvey Carruthers**
BVMS MBA
MRCVS

Staffordshire Bull Terriers are generally a healthy breed,

but like all dogs they can be affected by inherited diseases.

These are caused by faulty genes inherited by a dog from one or both parents. L2HGA, otherwise known as L-2-hydroxyglutaric aciduria is a serious disease which can cause fits and other neurological problems.

L2HGA was discovered in man in 1980 and in dogs in 2003. It is an uncommon but distressing disease, which affects about 2.5 in 1000 rescue Staffordshire bull terriers. It is less common in show Staffords, as Breed Clubs have worked to eliminate the disease.

Dogs cannot pick up the disease other than in their genes, from their parents. If a dog has no abnormal genes, she is termed

'clear' for L2HGA. If she has just one L2HGA gene, she is a 'carrier'; or if two affected genes, she will be 'affected'.

Dogs that are clear will never have the disease, neither will dogs who are 'carriers, however if bred they will pass on the defective gene. A dog that is 'affected' has L2HGA and is

The most common signs of L2HGA are fits, muscle cramps, wobbly walking and muscle cramps. Dogs may also have a poor attention span or other unusual behaviours. Because L2HGA shares symptoms with many other diseases it cannot be diagnosed without tests.

The easiest method is a DNA



likely to show signs of the disease.

Signs of the disease can develop in affected dogs from a few months to about three years old, although some dogs are older when they show signs.

test which uses a tiny number of cells gathered using a painless mouth swab.

Testing in the UK is carried out by the [Animal Health Trust in Newmarket.](#)



LEAD Initiative volunteers in Sutton, led by PC Heath Keogh (on right of picture)

L2HGA is an unusual problem because of the popularity of the breed and the fact that many dogs are not from well controlled breeding programmes. Careful breeding, using very simple DNA tests could completely eradicate this disease.

Volunteers for the L2HGA.com project were at Crufts this year handing out leaflets and talking to owners about the disease.

It was great to hear that the show fraternity were so familiar with the disease, but volunteers

had a very enjoyable day talking to members of the public and dog charities who were less familiar with L2HGA.

Pictured: The LEAD Initiative by the Metropolitan police in Sutton, led by PC Heath Keogh (on right of picture) aims to encourage responsible dog ownership through education about dog care and health issues such as L2HGA.

As PC Keogh says: “The project is about encouraging dog owners - whether in private

homes or tenanted properties - to be responsible dog owners.”

For more information, have a look at www.L2HGA.com, or at our Facebook page, and keep SPREADING the word, to vets, breeders, and rescue centres – you can help make a great difference to a lovely breed. ■

To get involved, email: info@L2HGA.com.

Pet bereavement: The pain of losing a beloved companion



By David Cliff

It's amazing how animals touch our lives in all sorts of ways.

They stimulate our compassion and our sense of awe. We view them in fascination in terms of how they have evolved and their form and function.

When it comes to pets, their personalities emerge and mix with behavioural traits common to each pet species and we develop a unique relationship with them that connects with us.

They become meaningful, they become individual, they

become something we can attach to. Their care requirements and their inability to function in the manmade environments we offer them, places a premium upon us to act with compassion, to act outside of ourselves in a giving, less egocentric way.

Pets connect with us in a quintessentially fundamental way. They are who they are, giving of their all from the nature of the beast that they are.

Pets don't have agendas, they don't have sophisticated cognitive plans from which they seek to achieve advantage over the rest of us.

Our pets simply want to be with us, develop relationships with us, attachments of their own to us and display an unusual mix of loyalty, adaptive behaviour, or simple dependency that calls us to compassion.

Pets are massively important in families where children can learn the value of care, can understand attaching to a pet and discovering the nature of love when family relationships are just a given that one has been born to. Pets are not born to a family; they are accepted into a family.

For our older population, where sadly many old people cannot speak to a familiar

person for up to six weeks at a stretch, pets become constant companions, a source of meaning, company and a way to give and receive love.

Pets also connect with us at a very primal level. We have seen many situations where animals such as cats or dogs can actually connect to people with psychological or neurological disorders. If we open ourselves up to our pets, the gifts they give us are enormous, reciprocal but typically always more finite than the relationships we have with our own species.

When it is time to say goodbye, this is often a conscionable act where an active decision is made on behalf of a loved companion to end suffering, though it terminates the relationship.

This final act of love often reflects the very quality and nature of the relationship itself, but it is nonetheless very painful.

Whilst for most there is an understanding of the ultimate finiteness of a pet's life and there is often less functional dependency on a pet than with other humans, nonetheless when the time comes to say goodbye, the vacuum left instead is great.

We know with human bereavement, that the support of phone calls and other gestures seem to end a couple of weeks after the funeral, as

people lose the loss from their "foreground awareness" and go back to their lives leaving those more intimately connected with the deceased to have to adjust in increasing levels of isolation.

Given this happens with our

“The heart does not distinguish between species in the sense of loss that ensues.”

own species, there is often a perception that when a pet ends its life this is something of a lesser status and impact. This is simply not true.

Many people feel less able to deal with their emotions and express their sense of loss over a pet because of a perception by others that important though it is, "it's just an animal". This implies some sort of ultimate increased value over human life next to a pet's life when frankly the heart that attaches knows little difference and doesn't discriminate between species in the sense of loss that ensues.

It is therefore very important to acknowledge the impact of a pet in your life and its loss. The grieving process is not species specific and people do need time, do need to reflect and talk, do need to celebrate

the impact of the life that one's pet has brought, the years of joy and pleasure, the companionship, the fun, the meaning and the investment of hard work and patience that can often go with an animal companion in one's life.

Just as with the loss of humans, we need a grieving process to effect appropriate psychological wellbeing. We should not short-change this process with our animal companions; friends and family need to talk about the reality of this. Even people who are not "pet oriented" need an appreciation that the loss is real, tangible, palpable and raw for a long time.

People need time to reflect before taking on another animal lest they simply "rebound" by trying to fill the vacuum that the loss of a loved pet has created, by something as shallow as a trip to the pet shop, only to have to adjust to the differences and the reality of a uniquely new relationship that must ensue, rather than a substitution for the old.

It is no accident that services have evolved to offer support for pet bereavement.

In an increasingly isolated, secular society with more single person households than ever before, one's pets offer the live in companionship that we often do not have with our own species.

To ignore the impact of their loss is to not only devalue the value of our companions but also to lose connection with our own fundamental emotional and psychological processes that underpin who we are as emotional sentient beings, quite apart from the deleterious impact on our mental health.

It is important for all of us to acknowledge the impact of the loss of a loved pet both for ourselves and in our friends, family and our business and work associates when it occurs to them. We also need to be sensitive to the grief of any other animal companions may have in the household also, and remember they often need an owner's presence and attention at these times.

It occurs to me that the intensity of our grief is an inverse reflection of the magnitude of attachment and meaning that a loved one has impacted on our lives.

Again, this is not species dependant and we need to be sensitive to people's loss and to actualise and celebrate the wonderful times that have been given by a pet as a counterbalance to some of the sad days that follow the ending of a unique relationship. ■

David Cliff is MD of [Gedanken](#), a company specialising in coaching-based support and personal development.

Pet of the month

Buster the 'Boxollie' (age 4)

By Angie Loraine,
Washington, Tyne & Wear

Buster was born in Wales (Mam is a Border Collie, while the dad is a Tall Boxer.)

At eight weeks old he went to Tyneside where he lived until the start of 2013. Unfortunately due to work commitments, his original family had to give him up.

My daughter Hollie has wanted a dog for nine years but my work didn't allow for this. In February last year circumstances changed and I began my search for 'the perfect dog'. I had metaphorically drawn up a list of what we wanted, but I had omitted to stipulate size!

After trawling dog re-homing centres, a synchronistic turn of events resulted in me being introduced to Buster. Buster loves sleepovers, so he came to Washington for a trial run. On returning to his original home the following day Buster greeted his previous owner, but then sat next to me - he had made his choice!

Buster came to stay for keeps the following Friday after a tearful farewell.

Hollie greeted him for the first time that day with amazement in her eyes - she sat down beside him on his bed, stroked his head, looked up at me and said "Mam, our family is now complete!"



Don't let the bugs bite: Say goodbye to fleas & ticks!



By Mark
Hedberg,
DrMedVet
MRCVS

When you've got a cat or a dog, one of the big things friends and neighbours warn you about is treating for fleas and ticks. It's a very confusing world out there – there are drops, pills, powders, shampoos, prescription-only medications, products available over the counter (OTC) – which do you pick?

Without going too deeply into specific products and ingredients, here is a field guide that will help you make the right choice based on your pet and your lifestyle.

When should I treat?

Conventional wisdom used to say that fleas were a summertime problem; with cold weather killing the parasites off. Unfortunately that's no longer the case; more and more pets live indoors instead of outside, and fleas are quite happy to ride your cat or dog into your house, where your central heating keeps



them warm and safe 365 days a year. So, if you find your pet is still scratching in December, you shouldn't rule out fleas because it's cold outside!

Ticks are also more and more frequent – while they used to be something you saw in rural or forested areas, they've made the transition to cities and can be seen in some of the same places fleas are.

Why should I treat?

For the most part, fleas and ticks stick to their favourite hosts; so if your dog or cat is available, these bloodsucking pests will feed on them before they feed on you. Fleas are very important in the transmission

of disease and other parasites (like worms!) and are responsible for spreading tapeworm, typhus, and even bubonic plague!

Ticks are famous for spreading Lyme disease, but can also spread a host of diseases like ehrlichia and babesia – these are blood parasites that can cause your pets serious health issues. They're all curable, but treatment is over several weeks and often involves a hospital stay. Finally, fleas drink blood and pass flea 'dirt' – which is a polite way of saying 'flea poo'. Flea dirt is very itchy and many animals are outright allergic to it.

It's called flea allergy dermatitis (FAD) and it causes such severe redness and itching that some animals can scratch and rub their skin raw, leaving them exposed to skin infections and other issues.

And now we come to the hard choices. What should we treat infestations with?

Flea drops/spot on

These are one of the most common treatments around – there are dozens of brands; some smell, some don't, some work, some don't. A spot-on works by absorbing into the skin and slowly distributing into the body; killing (and sometimes repelling) fleas and ticks. They are stored in the natural oils and fats of the skin.

One of the most common reasons for failure is bathing too soon – if you bathe right before the spot on, the skin doesn't have enough oils in it to work; and if your pet gets a bath (or swims!) right after applying the spot on, you've washed it off!

If you have a sensitive, allergic pet or a serious flea problem, you may need extra help – in which case it's best to go to the vet for a prescription-strength flea treatment. In the long term this will save you money by getting the problem solved sooner, with stronger medication.

Remember that not all spot-ons protect against ticks –

always read the label before giving any medication to your pet!

Warning: Dog spot-on medication should only be used for dogs – some dog spot-on products have a different ingredient (permethrin) that can make cats very seriously ill!

Flea tablets

Flea tablets can often seem like an excellent choice – they don't wash off, and there's none of the smell or mess that some spot-ons can involve. There are a few downsides, however – as anyone who has ever tried to pill a cat can testify!

Older OTC flea tablets work very well by killing fleas very quickly – their downside is that the duration of protection is very short – they only last a day or so. If your house is heavily infested by fleas, as soon as the medication wears off, fresh fleas jump right back on. So with OTC flea tablets, you will have to use other treatments (or more tablets) to ensure that the fleas stay off your pet.

There is hope, however - a prescription veterinary medication has recently been approved for use in the UK. It kills fleas just as quickly as the OTC tablets, but lasts an entire month. (Always check with your local veterinary surgeon to see if a medication is appropriate for your pet.)

Very few flea tablets kill ticks, so if you have a tick problem, you may need to use another type of treatment.

Flea collars

Dozens of brands are available from pet shops, and there's even a prescription flea collar (yes, they exist!) available from veterinary practices.

Generally speaking, OTC collars aren't very useful for serious flea infestations, and they can often smell and discolor the fur around your pet's neck. OTC Collars that get wet can often lose the chemical they're impregnated with, and you often can't use other treatments at the same time as a collar.

Pet flea sprays

As long as the flea spray contains fipronil, this is generally very safe for both adult and very young pets, both dogs and cats. That said, it's messy and smelly, and for larger animals you often need a large amount of product. Great for urgent and serious flea cases (when you can see them crawling all over your pet!) but for more regular maintenance, use one of the other treatment types above.

House sprays/bombs

As long as you remember not to apply a house spray to a pet, these sprays are an invaluable part of your arsenal against fleas and ticks.

These sprays can protect a three-bedroom house for up to 12 months – so fleas that drop off your pet will die before they can lay eggs.

It's important to remember to keep your pet treated with a flea remedy at the same time – the sprays are best when used in combination with other flea treatments.

Flea and tick shampoos

Flea and tick shampoos are a popular solution to infestations – they're great for mild flea issues, and a good bath can help wash out all the flea dirt and dead fleas in your pet's fur, helping their irritated skin settle. Always read the instructions to see how long the suds or shampoo should stay on before being washed off. If your pet has any ticks embedded in the skin; you'll probably need to remove them by hand – if they're dead, they don't let go!

A final word of warning – bathing cats is not for the faint of heart; if you have a cat with a bad flea problem, try a spray or a spot-on first.



The ravages of flea infestation

At the end of the day, your choice of treatment will be dictated by cost, convenience, lifestyle, effectiveness of the medication, and how severe your flea problem is.

If you've got a mild or

Natural remedies

Many companies advocate 'natural' therapies – where various herbs or oils (some of them expensive, some of them smelly) are advocated as powerful, effective flea destroyers.

Their efficacy has not been proven, and very often the smell or ingredient can be quite irritating to a pet – if it smells strong to you, remember that a dog's sense of smell is ten thousand times stronger than yours! Often, you'll end up with a strong-smelling pet who still itches.

Garlic, vinegar, lavender, and rosemary simply don't kill fleas, and cats generally hate the smell of citrus fruits like lemon. If you have a serious flea issue, it's best to seek professional advice.

moderate flea or tick issue, you may be perfectly satisfied with an OTC treatment, and if your dog swims frequently, you may have more luck with a tablet-based treatment. If you use a flea collar and are happy with the results (and your pet is flea-free) then by all means use a collar.

That said, if you've tried the OTC treatments and your pet is still having flea and tick problems, check with your local veterinary surgeon – they may be able to recommend a different treatment.

Not all flea treatments have the same ingredient – while they should all work equally well, no two pets are alike, and some animals respond better to one ingredient. Other pets are more comfortable with a different treatment.■



Sophie Loves...

Top picks by Sophie, the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel



Penlan Farm Range

Mixed Box, £10.38

This is a delicious moist food that I can most definitely recommend. Fresh and nutritious with none of the usual processed moist dog food smell, this is a great choice.

Mixed box of 6 x 400g pouches, comprising: 2 x 400g Chicken, Brown Rice & Vegetables, 2 x 400g Lamb, Brown Rice & Vegetables and 2 x 400g Egg, Rice & Vegetables. Hypo-allergenic. Suitable for seniors. <http://shop.burnspet.com> or from most good pet food retailers.

Woof Box: A selection box for dogs

www.woof-box.co.uk

This brilliant new subscription service that delivers tasty treats and toys to the door definitely gets a paws up!

The contents of each Woof-Box provide special treats, biscuits, chews and other exciting and useful products such as toys, grooming products, useful training aids and organic snacks. There are customised boxes for dogs with specific needs, with contents tailored for developing puppies, older arthritic dogs, weight-watching dogs or dogs that need products to help with problems such as hyperactivity or bad breath.



Handy travel dog kit

£9.99 www.oakroomshop.co.uk

This handy canine kit is essential for dogs on the go, like me! The “gift in a tin” contains a folding water bowl, an emergency dog lead, a night-glow dog tag and dog poop bags. Neatly presented in a handy storage tin, the Travel Dog Kit is ideal for keeping in the car. A unique and useful gift for dog owners.

