

# Hillsiders

## Christmas Times:

Open as normal Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> December

Friday 30<sup>th</sup> December

Open 9am to noon Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> December

Open Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> December 9am to noon

Closed Saturday evening surgery

Closed Saturday evening surgery

Closed Sunday (Christmas Day) and Monday (Boxing Day)

Closed Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> and Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January

Open as normal Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> December to

Emergency service will be available as usual during times the surgery is closed.

*We wish all a Merry Christmas and a healthy New Year. Please remember that dried fruit and chocolates are poisonous to dogs, as are onions, xylitol, alcohol and Christmas decorations. Unguarded electricity cables are attractive to most species to chew; and can be fatal.*

## New variant rabbit hvd.

There is a new strain of haemorrhagic viral disease of rabbits in the U.K. The current combined myxomatoses/hvd vaccine does not provide protection against it. A separate vaccine (imported under licence) must be used. We have that vaccine in stock. We recommend a gap of at least two weeks between vaccinations.

## Guinea pigs

On the whole guinea pigs are joyful pets to keep. Their food-motivated life style means they are forever eating, grinding their teeth and less likely to suffer from dental problems than rabbits. Selective breeding hasn't altered their skull shape like some breed of rabbits. They quickly associate you with food and will sing for their supper. This means that we don't see guinea pigs as regularly as rabbits.

But there are two serious problems that can put a guinea pig off its food. Cystic ovaries occur in mature sows. Outwardly there are no signs, but as the cysts increase sometimes to a quarter of the guinea pig's body size, pain suppresses their appetite. Spaying before complete cessation of eating is the best cure. Preventative spaying at an early age should be considered, similarly in rabbits to prevent uterine cancer.

The other problem is stones in the urinary tract. Depending on position and size, the stones can cause blood in the urine, incontinence, pain, and inappetence. The affected animal may be hunched, lethargic, losing weight and grinding their teeth. Stones can cause a complete

blockage, stopping the guinea pig from passing urine. The naturally alkaline urine with high mineral content will favour stone production and is difficult to alter. The stones are usually calcium oxalate or calcium carbonate. Low water intake, low exercise and urine retention will increase risk. Poor hutch hygiene, obesity and mineral supplementation may also contribute to risk of stone formation. It is not possible to put guinea pigs on a stone dissolving or prevention diet. However a diet high in hay and low in pellets with plenty of fresh fruit and veg seems to help. Avoid alfalfa hay as it is high in calcium, likewise spinach, kale, celery, parsley and strawberries are high in oxalates.

It should be remembered that guinea pigs cannot make Vitamin C and must have it in their diets. It is possible that excess Vitamin C can be broken down to oxalate (Recommended supplement level of 25-100mg/kg/day). Vitamin C drops in the water (200-400mg/l) will be inactivated by light. And severe shortage of calcium will cause bone disease.

### Alien invaders- second wave

A new parasite of dogs has been reported in the UK. *Linguatula serrata*, the tongue worm has been reported in rescued dogs imported into the country mainly from Romania. This parasite lives in the nose or sinuses of dogs. It may cause sneezing, nose-bleeds or pus; or be asymptomatic. Some routine wormers kill it effectively. The parasite is caught by dogs eating infected offal of sheep, goats, cattle, rabbits or horses.

### Cat arthritis check

It is more difficult to notice if a cat is suffering from arthritis compared to dogs. Older cats tend to sit still for long periods and we do not know if they are just contemplating the vagaries of life, or it hurts to move. What we can do is actively observe them and assign a score for how easy they can walk, run and jump. Do they still make it onto the kitchen bench? Are they sitting or lying like they use to? Have they stopped grooming, greeting you or making it to the litter tray? Stiffness and pain do not have to be tolerated. There are cat foods with supplements that can support joints. Long-term anti-inflammatories and other ways to ease their lives.

### Hens

Christmas is a great time to check for red mite. Those corrugated cardboard inserts in chocolate boxes can be rolled into a tight cylinder and tied to the under surface of the roost perches. Check after a few days to see if any mites are present.

Also the government has issued an order to keep all hens isolated from wild birds until 6<sup>th</sup> January. This may mean bringing your hens inside.

*Merry Christmas*