



Bellwether Magazine

Volume 1
Number 21 *Summer 1987*

Article 10

7-1-1987

Animal Crackers

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Animal Crackers

Bloat in Dogs

Each year it is estimated that there are at least 65,000 cases of bloat (acute gastric dilation). The cause is not known. It is a life-threatening condition and prompt treatment is necessary. The dilation of the stomach may lead to torsion (volvulus), which requires surgical correction.

Bloat usually occurs in the larger breeds. There is no hard evidence that there is a relationship to feeding practices, although many recommend small meals two or three times a day, with no exercise immediately after feeding.

An immediate priority is research on the epidemiology of the condition. This would include studying a number of cases of bloat along with the same number of dogs that do not have the problem. Feeding practices, diet, breed, housing, exercise, and any related factor would be analyzed. Is there an anatomic factor? Could there be some inherited defect? What are predisposing factors?

Until we know the cause, we cannot tell how to prevent bloat. Studies have shown that there is abnormal gas and fluid production in the stomach of affected dogs. Increased numbers of gas-producing bacteria have been found in some cases, but not in others. What is needed are controlled studies to establish a pattern to show what pre-existing conditions may lead to bloating.

Hypoglycemia in Dogs

Hypoglycemia (decreased blood glucose) is not a disease in itself but occurs in a number of different situations. Generally, the signs are neurological—weakness of the hind legs, generalized weakness, muscle twitching, seizures, and behavioral abnormalities.

Neonatal hypoglycemia occurs in very young puppies and may be due to trauma, dehydration, or hypothermia. If signs occur, some source of glucose should be given (Karo syrup, honey, or dextrose solution). The puppy must be kept warm.

Juvenile hypoglycemia ("toy breed" hypoglycemia) is seen in puppies of small breeds under six months of age. It can be precipitated by stress (shipping, exposure to cold), fasting, gastrointestinal disturbances, infectious disease, and parasitism. The condition usually responds promptly to glucose administration.

"Hunting dog" hypoglycemia has been reported in lean, high-strung hunters that may become weak and confused after several hours of work, and might have grand mal seizures. If hypoglycemic signs occur, a source of glucose should be given—some suggest candy bars as the most available in the field.

The above conditions are considered functional. They occur infrequently but can cause great concern. There are other more serious causes of hypoglycemia. If there is not prompt response to administration of glucose, veterinary advice is indicated.



Veterinary Students

The American Veterinary Medical Association reports that there will be 2,140 new veterinarians graduating in the United States. The University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine had 113 graduates in the Class of 1987 (73 women and 40 men). There are 109 students in the Class of 1991, entering in September 1987. Approximately 60 percent of applicants are women, 40 percent are men. The new First Year Class includes 71 from Pennsylvania, 28 from contract states (New Jersey 15, Maryland 5, Connecticut 2, Delaware 2, Vermont 2, New Hampshire 1, and Maine 1), and 10 from other states. There are no foreign students in this class.

"Contract States" are those that make agreements with Pennsylvania to accept a designated number of students from those states each year. Maine and Puerto Rico send one student every other year.

There have been 4,281 veterinarians graduated from the University of Pennsylvania since the first class in 1887.

AIDS

Recently, researchers at the University of California School of Veterinary Medicine discovered a new retrovirus in cats, named Feline T-Lymphotropic Virus (FTLV). In cats, FTLV suppresses the immune system, resulting in increased susceptibility to a wide variety of infections. FTLV is contagious and spread by intimate and prolonged contact. Much publicity has been given this discovery, particularly as a model in human AIDS research. Investigations are underway to determine the geographic extent of FTLV in cats. There is no evidence that FTLV is transmissible to humans.

At the present time, the virus causing AIDS in humans is not known to infect dogs or cats. No AIDS-like virus has been isolated from dogs.

There has been much inaccurate information published about the relationship between FeLV, FTLV, and human AIDS. Also, many reports have been misinterpreted. More is being learned every day and continuing research will provide answers to many questions.

Heartworm Disease Prevention

The drug *ivermectin* is now available by prescription from a veterinarian in tablet form (*Heartgard-30*). Given in the recommended dose once a month, it is effective against the developing tissue stage of *Dirofilaria immitis*. The proper dose should be given at monthly intervals during the period when mosquitoes are active. The initial dose must be given within a month after the first exposure to mosquitoes and the final dose within a month after the last exposure to mosquitoes.

The drug is not effective against adult heartworms and is not recommended for heartworm-positive dogs.

Some veterinarians seem to prefer using *diethyl-carbamazine* (DEC) which must be given daily. Because *ivermectin* is a prescription drug, discuss its use with your veterinarian.

Pregnancy in the Bitch

In the bitch, the number of days between mating and birth ranges from 58 to 71 days. Several methods are available to confirm pregnancy—abdominal palpation, radiography, and ultrasonography. An experienced person may detect the fetus by palpation at 21 to 28 days. Large bitches are more difficult to palpate. Radiographs will show the fetal skeleton after 45 days. Although this is relatively late in gestation, it remains the most accurate method of estimating litter size. Ultrasound examination can detect the fetus as early as 18 days. A painless, harmless procedure, ultrasound is a good method for confirming pregnancy, but is not as accurate as radiography for estimating number of puppies.

The problem of over-population is a serious one. Millions of abandoned or unwanted dogs and cats are euthanized each year by humane societies. A bitch should not be bred if the owner does not accept the responsibility for lifetime care of the puppies. Spaying (ovariohysterectomy) is the best method for canine birth control. This can be done easily and safely during the first three weeks of pregnancy. Reversible contraception is possible using drugs but there are many problems reported when such attempts are made to prevent estrus and postpone litters. Continuing research may develop pharmacologic agents that can be used as abortifacients or to prevent conception.

Many breeders of purebred dogs have puppies that they feel are not suitable for breeding. If there is a written agreement between the buyer and seller, signed by the buyer before the dog leaves the seller's premises, American Kennel Club registration papers will not be furnished to the buyer until the seller has been furnished with evidence that the dog has been neutered or spayed. Spay-Neuter Contracts are acceptable under A.K.C. rules.

Popular Breeds

American Kennel Club registration statistics for 1986 show that Cocker Spaniels are the most popular breeds, followed by Poodles and Labrador Retrievers. The Cocker is number one for the fourth year in a row. The others in the "Top Ten" are Golden Retrievers, German Shepherds, Chow Chows, Beagles, Miniature Schnauzers, Dachshunds, and Shetland Sheepdogs.

In 1986, 1,106,399 individual dogs were registered. There is evidence that there is a rising interest in the smaller breeds. Senior citizens looking for companions find smaller dogs more manageable. Young urban couples may prefer smaller dogs because they require less space.

