

Dog & Small Animals Vet



Dr Adam Gordon - Maroubra Veterinary Hospital

Adam Gordon graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. He completed a Masters degree in Veterinary Studies at Murdoch University in 2002. Adam has been in companion animal practice since 1990 and is principal of Maroubra Veterinary Hospital.

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Flatus

Dear Dr Adam

I have an eight-year-old rescue Setter who has been with us nearly two years. She's an indoor dog but the problem is that she is really farty. We have little idea on her background like if she's had any gastro problems and am wondering if there is a medical problem.

She gets a diet of chicken mince, mixed with Weetbix with cooked cabbage and dried food. Regular exercise isn't a problem as she has two brisk walks a day (just one if it's wet) and we give her treats like liver.

Her flatulence is mostly in the evenings-we notice it when watching the TV but it's really bad and she can easily clear a room.

Hope you can help,

Rosie S. Castle Hill

Hi Rosie,

What a stinky problem; you have my sympathy. Fortunately for you I see less stinky times ahead in your household. Investigation and management of flatulence is usually fairly straightforward, and significant improvements will be seen with some simple measures.

A minor technicality; your Setter's problem is actually termed flatus. Flatulence is excessive formation of gas in the stomach and intestine. Flatus is gas expelled through the anus (apologies to anyone eating their Weetbix).

Another important consideration before we get our teeth into this problem - are you certain that your Setter is the actual source of this problem? It would not be the first time that the poor old dog cops the blame for someone else's Henry the VIII (that is, a malodorous bottom emission that would decapitate the wife).

Your concern about the possible presence of a medical problem is a very valid consideration, as flatulence and flatus occur with several gastrointestinal disorders. However, in the absence of other signs such as weight loss, vomiting and diarrhoea, I think it is most unlikely that your dog has a medical problem.

There are a number of factors that may be contributing to your dog's flatus. Diet is the most important factor, and I believe that it is likely that with some dietary modifications there will be a dramatic improvement in your Setter's problem.

The other factor apart from intestinal disease and diet that contributes to flatulence and flatus is excessive aerophagia (swallowing of air). This is seen more commonly in certain dog breeds such as the Setters. Feeding smaller meals more frequently and avoiding feeding straight after exercise will reduce the amount of swallowed air.

Ensuring your dog is receiving a highly digestible diet will greatly reduce the amount of flatulence and flatus. The cabbage is a problem. Cabbage is a member of the Brassica family of plants, which also includes cauliflower, broccoli and brussels sprouts. These plants are all high in sulphur, which gives any gas produced a foul odour.

These vegetables also contain non-absorbable oligosaccharides (complex sugars). Dogs lack the enzymes to break these sugars down, so they are fermented in the gut by bacteria producing large amounts of gas. Soybeans, peas and beans also contain large amounts of non-absorbable oligosaccharides and should be avoided if flatus is a problem.

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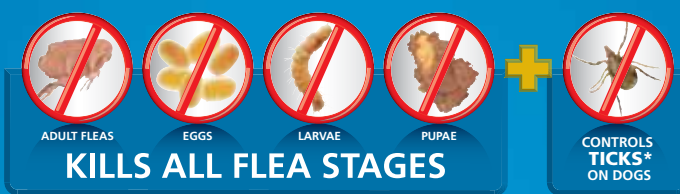
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Cutting out the cabbage should improve things significantly. I commend you for including fresh vegetables in your dog's diet. Vegetables like cabbage are very good for us, containing large amounts of anti-oxidants and having a protective effect against cancer causing compounds. They have been shown to reduce the incidence of bowel cancer in people. Perhaps once the flatus has been controlled you could consider trying some different vegetables in her diet. Try replacing the Weetbix with boiled rice.

Without knowing what type of dry food you are feeding it is difficult to know if it might be contributing to the problem. You do get what you pay for, and the "premium" type dry foods contain higher-quality ingredients that are more readily digestible and less likely to result in flatulence and flatus.

Check the ingredients on the dry food you are using. If it contains soybean meal try switching to a different formulation. It is also worth trying a different protein source to the one currently being fed. If your dry food contains chicken meal and corn, you could try switching to a formulation that contains lamb, rice and barley. Your friendly vet or vet nurse will be able to provide several recommendations that will greatly reduce the amount of flatus.

You don't mention dairy products, but it is worth noting that dogs are usually lactose intolerant, and consequently diets containing dairy products will increase the amount of flatus.

If you are still experiencing problems after instituting these dietary measures I think it is time to have a long hard look (smell?) at the other members of your household.



Cat Vet



Melissa Catt BVSc MACVSc (feline)
Paddington Cat Hospital

Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral, in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

183 Glenmore Road, Paddington NSW 2021
Phone: (02) 9380 6111 Website: www.catvet.com.au

Dear Melissa Catt,

A month ago we took a family holiday and left our cat Scoobie at home. She was cared for at home by a neighbour who came each day to feed and play with her. It's a great situation for us as we too look after their cats when they're away.

My question is that Scoobie seems to flinch and twitch now when we give her long strokes. It's almost like she's wincing in a bit of pain when we touch her lower back. We're due to go to our vet soon for her shots so I wonder whether it would be a good idea to go to the trouble of having an x-ray to see if there is some injury that could be causing this. My husband thinks it's probably nothing but I'm worried that perhaps something has fallen on her and she has had some kind of injury. Scoobie is desexed and is a very active four-year-old Burmese cross and I really think this is quite unusual.

Tracey S.

Dear Tracey,

It's great for you and your neighbours to have such a convenient arrangement, and cats do like to stay at home if possible, even when you're not there. The downside is that there is less supervision during this time, and cats are not very good at telling us what happened when something goes wrong!

Twitching and flinching when stroking the back can be seen with a number of potential processes involving different body systems, and so a visit to the vet would be worthwhile. However, one of the most common reasons I have come across, especially in warmer weather, is fleas!! So it would be prudent to check your cat for fleas (with a fine-toothed flea comb is best) and treat. Please bear in mind that you may not necessarily see any fleas or flea dirt as cats are very good groomers and often get rid of the evidence before you have a chance to see it. Flea dirt is black, and often comma shaped, if you place it on a wet tissue you will see it turn a dark red colour over a minute. We have had a particularly bad season for fleas this year, and I am continuing to see fleas on cats even in this cold weather. It would be a good idea to ensure you use a monthly flea control on a regular basis (for example Revolution or Advocate for cats) as well as a capstar tablet as needed (the capstar can be used as often as every second day, and kills the fleas within half an hour).

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Skin irritation can certainly cause the signs you have described, and allergy to fleas (and not just the presence of fleas) is common, and tends to start showing itself in cats at approximately 3-4 years of age. If there is a skin allergy (with red skin, small scabs and sometimes open sores), this needs to be looked at by your vet to check if specific treatment is required. There are also other potential skin diseases that your vet can check for, which are less common.

If fleas and skin issues are ruled out, and your vet feels there is a definite problem, then radiographs (xrays) may be warranted, as skeletal changes can cause sensitivity and pain. There may have been a specific episode, for example landing at an awkward angle to bring this on, but not necessarily.

A much less common possibility is something called feline hyperaesthesia syndrome ('twitchy cat disease'). This is a fairly uncommon but frustrating condition where the cat starts to actually bite at its skin and cause damage. It can be difficult to find the underlying cause, so it is obviously important to rule out any skin or skeletal problems first, as treatment for this can be varied and difficult.

Good luck!



Bird and Exotics Vet

Dear Urban Animal Bird Vet,

We have a Lorikeet called Indie. He's in a decent-sized cage and we're thinking of getting a larger parrot along the idea of a Corella or an Alexandrine.

What we're not sure is whether the two birds will get a long and whether we can have both in one large cage together. Do they have to be the same species to be in the same cage? Would one type of bird be better suited to get along with Indie the Lorri? We don't want to get another Lorri because we don't want to breed and we're keen to have another type of parrot. I work from home so have my current bird with me all the time so they get plenty of attention.

Thanks
G. Sweatton
Baulkham Hills

It is important to consider having another bird as company for your lorikeet. Most parrots, especially lorikeets, live in reasonably large flocks, so they feel safer when they are housed with similar types of birds. For most birds, a bird of the same species is important although another bird in the house of any species is better company than no other bird at all. This is the case even if you are home all day.

Lorikeets have special dietary requirements as they eat only nectar and fruit and are not seed eaters. They cannot be put with seed-eating birds because they are not to have access to seed or they will become ill.

Lorikeets are medium-sized birds with sharp beaks and as they are excitable will irritate the larger birds such as corellas and Alexandrians who will then fight with your lorikeet. Even when playing, the larger bird will nip and hurt the lorikeet with their larger beak while the lorikeet will often injure other bird species with their sharp beak. Also all new birds carry diseases and birds of different species may carry diseases that can make other bird species very sick or even die. For these reasons lorikeets should only be kept with other lorikeets.

In general all indoor caged birds should only be kept with birds of the same species. Rainbow lorikeets can also be kept with red-collared lorikeets and occasionally olive lorikeets. Scaly breasted lorikeets may be okay but, as they are smaller, they may be attacked by the larger rainbow lorikeet. All other Australian lorikeets, such as musk lorikeets, are too small to be kept with a rainbow lorikeet.

To make sure the two lorikeets don't produce any babies you need to have birds of the same sex. To find the sex ask your veterinarian to take blood for the DNA sexing of your bird. Remember, whatever bird you acquire to keep your lorikeet company, the new bird could bring in new problems and diseases. It is therefore important to keep the birds separate for 6 weeks and take the new bird to an avian veterinarian for a health check and disease testing in the first week you acquire it.

**Dr Alex Rosenwax - BVSC MACVSc (Avian Health)
Bird & Exotics Veterinarian, Green Square.**

Alex graduated from the University of Sydney in 1991. He achieved Membership of the Avian Health Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in 1996. In November 1996 he opened the first and only Sydney all bird and exotic pet practice. The Clinic moved to 1 Hunter St Waterloo in 2003 and sees approximately 80% birds, and 20% fish, reptiles and other exotic pets. Alex is the current president of the Australian Veterinary Association Avian Group.

**Shop 3, Block D, 1 Hunter St Waterloo, Sydney 2017
Ph: (02) 9319 6111 <http://www.birdvet.com.au>**



Dear Dr. Rosenwax,

I'm confused about perches for our parrot as I can't seem to get conflicting advice from pet store people and what I find to read. We used to have some sandy-type perches that we were told would not be good for the health of our parrot Pappy's toes. A lot of people said these were too rough and scratched the feet.

We replaced them but now Pappy's claws or nails are really long and sharp. The previous perches seems to keep them nice and trimmed and now they're really long and scratchy. Pappy is a young Conure and likes to hop on our shoulders around home. The kids are complaining that her toes hurt and scratch them. It doesn't bother me as I always wear a towel on my shoulder when she's on me so I don't feel it.

Michael Chance
Cremorne

The sandpaper perches can be great for keeping nails shortened and blunt. However, it is also true that they can lead to very sore feet and are uncomfortable for most birds in the long-term. Some of these birds' feet can become so scratched on the underside that they can become infected, a condition commonly called bumblefoot. We therefore generally recommend only using a small piece of sandpaper attached around one small area of the wire on the cage side for the birds to scratch their beaks or claws on, and not using them on the perches.

Toenails that are long and sharp can definitely be uncomfortable. These birds have naturally sharp nails in order to cling on to the sides of branches whilst eating. If you find these nails painful or annoying there are several methods to solve this problem. Putting one of the newer cement-roughened half-length perches seems to keep most nails shortened, usually without the painful side effects of bumblefoot. Do not have more than one of these perches in the cage and have natural Australian wood perches for the rest of the cage. Clipping the nails can also be performed by your veterinarian or at home use an emery board to file the nails. Some birds hate this being done but many medium-to-larger birds can be trained to hold out their feet for nail filing. If the nails continue to grow there may be other more serious problems. In these cases consult your avian veterinarian.



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