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# Cat vet questions

**Melissa Catt BVSc**  
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



Dear Dr Catt,

We got our cat about two years ago from a shelter. He was about twelve weeks old when we got him. Jazz has always had this habit of climbing onto my lap and pushing his front paws into my knee before he settles down and sleeps. I've never really minded this except when he uses his claws and obviously this can hurt. In the cooler months I've put a jumper or blanket over my lap so that the claws don't hurt but as it gets warmer and clothes are lighter, this is not a comfortable option. Is there anything I can do to deter this 'kneading' type of behaviour? I don't want to shoo him off me but I also don't want to be his personal pin-cushion.

Kneading behaviour in cats is a self-comforting type behaviour, and cats will do this when they are relaxed. Kittens will knead their mums when suckling. Jazz obviously thinks you are a very comfortable bed to lie on, so I guess you can take it as a compliment!! Of course excessive kneading on a bare lap can be rather painful, so you can try redirecting the behaviour. The most important thing to keep in mind is not to punish him in any way (eg saying 'no' and shooing him off), as this may make him scared and anxious about going on your lap. Cats often like soft surfaces to knead on (like laps!), so you could try providing him with a small fleecy mat or soft toy placed next to you. Some cats are responsive to catnip containing toys, and will preferentially use these for their kneading. When he climbs on your lap, place him gently next to you and see if he will take to the alternative. You could even try popping him on your lap once he's kneaded the mat and settled himself down if you like, although he mightn't transfer without another round of 'making puddings' (this is what the nurses in England used to call kneading when I worked there years ago!). If he is an indoor cat, another thing you can consider is clipping the ends of his claws, so he is effectively doing the same thing, but the pain factor is eliminated!

Dear Dr Catt,

We have an older Labrador who has been on glucosamine and chondroitin powder mixed with his food to help his joints. It was suggested by our vet and I can't help wonder whether this would also assist our ageing cat as well. Ziggy is close to ten years and although he's still fairly spry, he is slowing down and doesn't quite have the spring in his step. His next check up isn't until mid-year so I thought I would ask your opinion before seeing our vet.

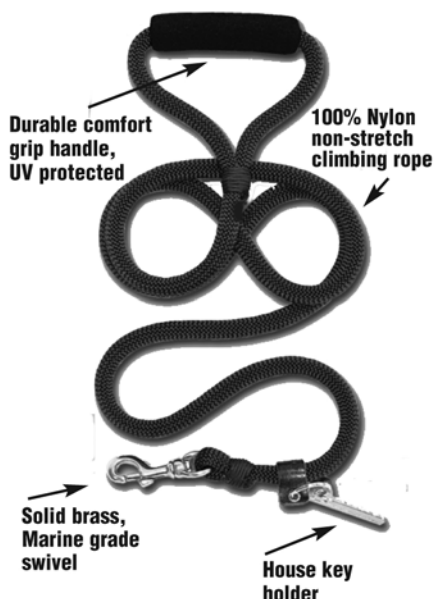
Glucosamine is a natural substance, which helps provide the building blocks for (and can stimulate the biosynthesis of) the base substance of joints. Chondroitin sulfate also has a similar effect. They help to repair joint surfaces and can have an anti-inflammatory effect, and are commonly found together in joint medications. They have been used in humans and dogs for a number of years, for the treatment of degenerative joint diseases (DJD), mainly with good success. There is not much information available for their use in cats (possibly because cats, being much smaller and more agile animals, have less incidence of DJD). According to anecdotal reports and personal experience these substances seem relatively safe and can be fairly effective, although there is variation between individuals (probably due to differences in the underlying disease process). It takes a couple of months before the levels build up in the body to see a clinical effect. There is an injection available from the vet (Cartrophen or Pentosan Vet) which works in a similar way, but is much more potent and works a lot more quickly. The injections are usually given once weekly for 4 weeks initially, then as required (eg a course at the beginning of each Winter). We will usually see a positive response to the injections in the first 2-3 weeks.



It is important to note the following: this product is not licensed for use in cats (neither are the injections mentioned above); there are no scientific studies in cats regarding these substances; and there can be variation in the quality of the different brands available. Before considering using glucosamine/chondroitin, I would strongly recommend having Ziggy checked over by your vet, getting your vet's opinion on using this for Ziggy, and ensuring that you source the medication from your vet (as the quality is likely to be higher and more consistent). Ten years old in a cat is still only late middle age, and we can start to see arthritic changes at this age (especially if there have been prior injuries), but I wouldn't assume that Ziggy's 'slowing down' is arthritis, as there may be another factor. Good luck!

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# Dog/small animal questions

**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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Dear Dr Adam,

I have a 1 year old female ferret. My vet has told me I should get her desexed. Is this really necessary? She lives in my house and will never have access to a male ferret.

This is a very good question and one that vets are often quizzed on. Your vet has given you good advice and I would also strongly recommend desexing of your jill (female ferret). The reason for recommending desexing of all female ferrets not used for breeding is to prevent life threatening bone marrow disease.



Female ferrets have a breeding season during which they come on heat. They will stay on heat until they are mated or the end of the breeding season. This prolonged heat (oestrous) results in high sustained levels of the hormone oestrogen. In ferrets, this can bring about oestrogen induced bone marrow toxicity. As a result the bone marrow fails to produce red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets. Most affected ferrets will die.

You can rest assured that desexing your ferret will prevent this condition and won't have any adverse effects on her. As an added bonus, desexing will also help reduce your ferret's body odour!

Dear Dr Adam,

I get so much conflicting information from people regarding foods that are toxic or plain unhealthy for dogs. I have an energetic Kelpie X who just loves his food and at Christmas time my sister yelled at me for giving him the off-cuts of the ham. She gave me a whole run down of foods that were not suitable. I then got on the net and got even more scary information-some of it I'm not sure was true or not. Help?

It pays to remember that dogs are not little people. Just because a food or medicine is safe for us humans does not mean it is safe for our canine friends. As an aside, you should never give your pet human medicine unless your veterinarian has told you to. As for food, there are a number of foodstuffs that can make dogs very sick or even kill them.

Foodstuffs that can poison dogs include:

- Chocolate
- Onions and garlic
- Macadamia nuts
- Potato peelings and green looking potatoes
- Rhubarb leaves
- Raisins and grapes

## Bird & exotics vet questions

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  
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I have a one-year-old long-necked turtle. He lives in an aquarium tank in the house. I feed him on mince and steak every day. I am concerned that this is not a balanced diet as his shell seems a little soft.

Australian long-necked turtles should be fed a varied diet of whole fish, whole mice, yabbies, shrimps, worms and insects. These should be cut into bite-sized pieces. Some will also eat water plants. A good idea is to feed small fish such as whitebait twice a week and other food such as bloodworms, shrimps or insects once a week. The total amount of food per meal should be approximately equal to the size of the turtle's head. Calcium is important for strong bones and shells - without this your turtle will develop a rubbery texture to the shell and curling of the shell edges, a condition known as "soft shell". Raw red meat and mince is not an appropriate diet as they lack calcium and many vitamins.

Turtles also need to have a water temperature of 22-25 degrees Celsius and enough exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light in order to digest their food properly and utilise the dietary calcium. A source of ultraviolet light, either through exposure to unfiltered, natural sunlight, or an artificial UV light, is necessary to help prevent Vitamin D deficiency, and skin and bone disorders. Remember to replace the light regularly (every 3-6 months) as it will lose strength even though the light still works.

Feeding frequency is generally once daily for juvenile turtles and three times a week for adult turtles.

Remember, turtles only eat in the water - they will refuse food if it is placed elsewhere. Don't give up if he doesn't eat the new foods immediately as some turtles may take several weeks to accept dietary change.

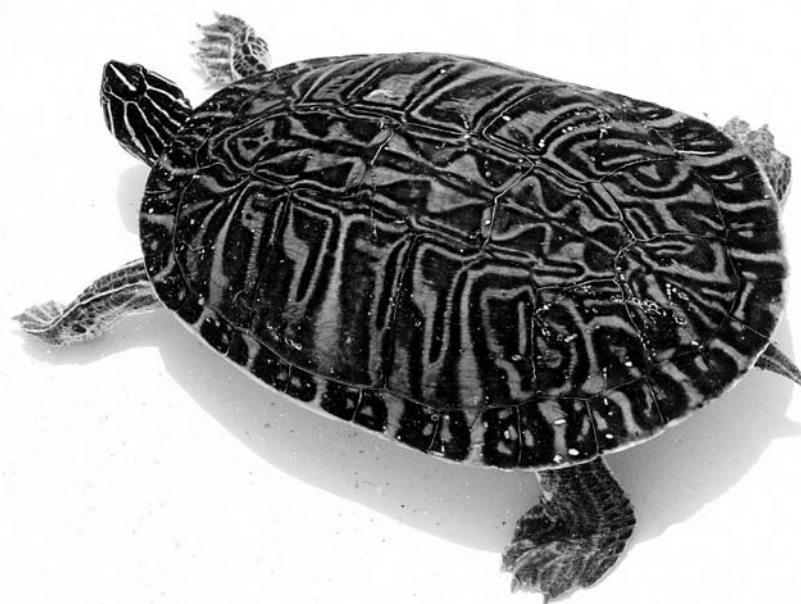
Raisins and grapes are a fairly recent addition to the list of foods that dogs should not be fed. As little as a handful can make a dog extremely ill, resulting in acute kidney failure and possible death.

Your sister was right to tell you not to feed the off-cuts of the Chrissy ham-dogs should also not be fed foods that are fatty or spicy. Fatty meals may cause a serious disease called pancreatitis in some dogs. Veterinarians tend to see an increased number of cases of this disease around Christmas as a result of dogs eating large amounts of ham and off-cuts from turkey. Whilst pancreatitis is a treatable disease, affected dogs become very unwell and need to be hospitalised. Some severely affected dogs die of this disease. We don't fully understand why some dogs can eat large amounts of fatty food without causing a problem and others get sick, but this is definitely a case of prevention being easier than cure.

I have a 6-month-old cockatiel called Baby. I am concerned with all the very hot weather in February-March that she will be too hot. Will this be a problem and, if so, how can I keep her cool?

Cockatiels can live in quite hot climates as they come from very dry hot areas of Australia. However in our hot humid climate they may still overheat. Signs of overheating are having the feathers sleek and flat on the body while the wings are outstretched fanning back and forth with very hard open-mouthed breathing. To avoid overheating keep your bird inside on hot days and away from direct sunny areas near windows. On hot days you should spray your bird several times a day with a fine mist of water.

If your bird does show signs of being overheated spray her with water and take her to a cooler part of the house. Air-conditioned rooms are okay though it is best not to put birds into the direct path of an air-conditioner. If your bird continues to pant, starts to fluff up, or in more serious cases to seizure, seek veterinary advice.



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