



CO2 LASER

Limerick Veterinary Hospital has new technology resulting in greater comfort and better healing for many of our patients. The standard metal scalpel has been the instrument for hundreds of years in medicine but it now has been outclassed by the carbon dioxide laser. Use of the laser insures an almost bloodless surgery field together with a great reduction in pain because the nerves to the tissue are actually sealed by the procedure.

Limerick Veterinary Hospital is one of the few hospitals in the area to offer this modern laser process.

We are offering all pet owners the use of the laser for their pet's neutering. Use of the laser for routine neutering can reduce bleeding and keep post surgical pain to a minimum.

We would be glad to discuss this surgical alternative with you when you are making plans to have your pet spayed or castrated. There is an additional fee for the use of this high tech instrument but we feel it is money well spent.

Pre Anesthetic Blood Work

Limerick Veterinary Hospital recommends that all animals have blood work before anesthetic procedures. Blood work results give us insight about the health of the internal organs which cannot be determined on a physical exam. We require all animals over six years of age to have a complete blood count and chemistry panel before anesthesia. The complete blood count provides information about anemia, infection and parasitism. The chemistry panel helps to evaluate the liver, kidneys, pancreas and adrenal glands along with electrolyte, protein and glucose levels. These tests should be run a few days before the anesthetic procedure to allow time to address the problem. There is a small panel which can be run in-house the morning of the procedures on young animals, but provides much less information. Please ask your veterinarian about pre-anesthetic blood work before your pet's next anesthetic procedure.

Dental Procedures

The first step is a complete physical examination. This gives us an idea of general, overall health. If we are able to do an oral exam we will, but a thorough oral exam can only be done under anesthesia. Depending on the age of the animal, pre-anesthetic blood work may be required to check organ function and for signs of disease.

The day of the procedure the pet is examined again to make sure nothing has changed. An intravenous catheter is placed and intravenous fluids are administered. An anesthetic protocol is selected which is most appropriate for the pet and its current health status. Once anesthetized with injectable anesthesia an endotracheal tube is placed to protect the respiratory system from the water used in the procedure. All dogs are placed on inhaled anesthesia. Cats may be placed on inhaled anesthesia depending on their health status.

Finally we can get to the teeth. They are cleaned both manually and with an ultrasonic cleaner just like at your own dentist. Once they are cleaned each tooth is examined individually for fractures, wear, loss of gum, loss of bony support and cavity like holes. If there are any problems dental xrays will be taken to further indentify the extent of the damage. At this point a decision will need to be made if it is best to leave the tooth in place and attempt treatment of the problem or remove the tooth. If teeth are removed, pain relievers and antibiotics may be administered. After any problems with the teeth are dealt with, the teeth are polished and the animal is removed from the anesthesia. Your pet's recovery is monitored by a technician until it is awake. Once the animal is awake it can be sent home. It may go home with antibiotics and pain relievers for you to administer at home.

Diet and Weight Management

Studies have shown that 30 – 40% of the pets in the US are overweight. Obesity is one of the most common diseases affecting dogs and cats today. Pets can suffer from the same problems as overweight people, including heart disease, respiratory problems, diabetes and arthritis. Torn ligaments and worn down joints are more likely to occur in overweight pets, making it very painful for them to get around. Just a few extra pounds can make a big difference in your pets overall health. Diet, exercise and monitoring your pets weight regularly are very important.

An easy way to tell if your pet is overweight is by feeling his or her ribs and by looking for your pets' waist. If you have to press hard to feel your pets ribs and can't see an hourglass-like waistline on your pet then he or she is probably overweight.

Weight loss does not happen overnight and patience is the key. A low-fat and high fiber diet is ideal for adult dogs. Cats require a diet higher in protein. Some pets require a special diet, which is available through your veterinarian, to help shed unwanted weight.

Exercise is also very important to keeping those unwanted pounds off. Even going for a walk a day can help to keep your pet fit and trim. Pets can also team up with their owner and help each other lose weight by becoming healthier together.

Acupuncture for Pets?

Acupuncture, like all medicine, has been evolving over the last 3,000 years. This energy belief system can now be correlated with our pet's nervous and circulatory systems via Anatomy and "Western Medicine" techniques.

Acupuncture is becoming more popular as an integrative therapy in veterinary medicine, in order to "balance" the body.

Acupuncture is a medical treatment performed by the insertion of sterile (single-use) small diameter needles through the skin into the underlying tissues and muscles at specific points on the body. It stimulates the calming and anti-inflammatory nervous system therefore stopping hyperactivity that can lead to chronic pain conditions. It also promotes motility, releases inhibitory pain chemicals from the brain, causes blood vessel dilation to increase healing, and supports the immune system.

Acupuncture is not meant to replace other methods of medical management prescribed for pet. It can act as a complimentary treatment for: osteoarthritis, disc herniation and back pain, nerve injury, post-operative pain, urinary and fecal incontinence, constipation and other intestinal disease, allergies, wound healing, and other conditions.

In order to determine if Acupuncture can help your dog, cat, or exotic pet, a full examination and appropriate diagnostic testing should be performed first in order to achieve a medical diagnosis. This is essential to help rule out problems such as cancer or infection that are unlikely to respond to and may be complicated by Acupuncture therapy.

In general, 80% of patients respond within 3-4 visits and 10% have a strong immediate response. Acupuncture is considered extremely safe and side effects are rare, but you can expect your pet to be slightly tired or sedate after treatment because of the pain mediators released from the brain.

Call us today to schedule a consultation and find out if Acupuncture can help your pet here at Limerick Veterinary Hospital!

ARTHRITIS

One out of five dogs suffer from the affects of arthritis. Arthritis is one of the most commonly treated sources of pain by veterinarians. Any dog or cat can experience arthritis at any time, but more often in the later stages in life. Arthritis is a degenerative disease of the joints

Watching your pets' weight can lesson the affects of arthritis. Obesity can be a major strain on joints that are not made for that kind of weight. Regular exercise is essential to maintaining joint movement, but may need to be modified with your pets' condition. Regular exercise can help by increasing muscle strength and stabilize joints.

Some signs of arthritis to watch out for are:

Limping

Trouble getting up

Trouble going up or down stairs

Decreased Activity

Increased stiffness

There are several products out there that can decrease the amount of discomfort that your older pet may be experiencing. Routine blood work is needed to monitor organ function while your pet is taking some of these medications. Acupuncture and Laser treatments can also be used to help with the pain of arthritis. Ask your veterinarian which medication is right for your pet.

Kidney Disease

Kidney disease is one of the most common medical problems of geriatric pets. It is also one of the leading causes of death in older pets. The kidneys have a very important role in the body. They are responsible for removing waste from the blood and regulating body fluids. The term “kidney disease” is used when the kidneys fail to properly perform and waste builds up in the body. Most signs of kidney disease aren’t present until more than two-thirds of the total function is already lost. Once a kidney is damaged it will not regenerate and the disease is usually progressive.

Some causes of kidney disease are inherited defects, infection, shock, blood loss, age, and nutritional and toxic substances. Both dogs and cats are affected by kidney disease and the prevalence of kidney failure increases with age.

Some signs of kidney failure are:

- ◆ Decreased appetite ◆ Lethargic
 - ◆ Increased thirst ◆ Bad breath
 - ◆ Depression ◆ Not eating for a day or more
 - ◆ Increased or no urination ◆ Weakness
 - ◆ Poor coat ◆ Lack of coordination when walking
 - ◆ Vomiting ◆ Weight loss
 - ◆ Diarrhea

Sometimes these signs appear quickly and other times they develop slowly over time. Once chronic kidney failure starts, it cannot be reversed, only slowed down. Acute kidney failure can be stopped and treated successfully. Treatment may include IV fluids, special diet with decreased protein and salt intake, medication for high blood pressure, hospitalization and supportive care.

Ask your pet's doctor today about testing for kidney disease. This is done by running simple blood and urine tests and should be monitored closely even if there are no signs yet.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGING PETS

We all want to keep our pets healthy and happy for as long as we can. There are simple things that we can do to allow our pets to live healthier lives as they age. These include:

Routine Physical Exams: Your pet's body is aging faster than you may realize. Physical exams can help identify problems early. It is recommended that older pets be examined twice yearly.

Brush Frequently: This is especially important in longer haired pets. Our pets are not able to groom themselves as well, as they age. It will help prevent the hair from becoming matted and keep their skin healthier.

Clip Nails: By keeping their nails short, we can prevent overgrowth causing nails to be easily ripped. Also, nails can overgrow to the point of damaging pads. Also, shorter nails can aid in avoiding slips and falls on slick surfaces.

Fresh Water: Keep plenty of water available for your pet. Also monitor intake as a change in water consumption can indicate a problem arising.

Environment: Keep your older pets indoor more often especially in inclement weather. As they age, pets are not as able to keep themselves warm.

Keep A Weight Chart: It is very important to keep your pets close to an ideal weight. Overweight animals will stress their joints. They may already have some arthritis present making them uncomfortable. Also, weight loss can be caught early as this may be a sign of a problem.

Regular Exercise: Keep your older pets moving. Daily walks and play time help keep joints from becoming stiff.

LIVER DISEASE

The liver has many complex functions in the body, especially since it is the largest organ. In the body, the liver has a major role in removal of toxins and stores vitamins and minerals. Liver disease does not target any specific age or breed, but it is a serious problem. If the liver is not functioning properly or is at below peak efficiency, then the term liver disease is used,

Some causes of liver failure (but not limited to) are viral and bacterial infections, poisons or drugs ingested by your pet and certain breeds that do not excrete copper correctly, such as the West Highland Terrier and the Bedlington Terrier. Cats can experience a type of life threatening liver disease call Feline Hepatic Lipidosis. This can happen when a cat stops eating for several days.

Some signs of liver disease include:

- Lack of appetite
- Vomiting
- Weight loss
- Depression
- Increased thirst
- Dark urine
- Pale or yellow gums
- Fluid in the abdomen

Simply running a routine blood chemistry panel can catch liver disease before it gets out of control. Ask your veterinarian today about testing for liver disease in your older pet.

Laboratory Testing

Pets need to have routine lab work run just like people do to keep an eye on their overall health. Laboratory tests can help a veterinarian rule out illnesses and confirm the presence of others. Many times a veterinarian will run certain lab tests when a pet is healthy to help establish a baseline, so that if a pet gets sick they have something to compare. Pre-surgical blood work can help to determine if a patient is more at risk of complications with general anesthesia, even if they are young and healthy. There are a variety of laboratory tests that your veterinarian may choose to run based on your pet's breed, age, sex and symptoms. Here are a few of the more common tests in detail.

Chemistry Panel (also known here as SMA)

This tests the functions of certain vital organs such as the liver, kidney and pancreas. It also measures electrolytes and enzymes in the blood. Follow-up testing is common to monitor the body's response to treatment. Base-line values are helpful to diagnose new problems and monitor current ones.

Complete Blood Count (CBC)

This test does exactly what its name says it does. It measures the number of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets in a given sample of blood. Your veterinarian can also monitor your pet's response to some treatments by analyzing the results of follow-up CBC's.

Urinalysis

This test can help a veterinarian in the diagnosis of urinary-tract infections, diabetes, dehydration, kidney problems and some other conditions. The concentration (or dilution) of a urine sample can help diagnose certain diseases. Also, by running a urinalysis, a veterinarian can detect the presence of certain substances such as protein, sugar, white blood cells or blood that may not normally appear in urine.

DIABETES MELLITUS

Diabetes mellitus is a disease involving glucose (sugar) in the blood and insulin. Insulin is a hormone produced by the body to regulate blood glucose. Diabetes occurs when your pet's body has too much blood glucose because he either doesn't produce enough insulin or is insensitive to the available insulin in his body.

Diabetes is one of the most common hormonal disorders in dogs and cats. The disease is most often seen in older, overweight female dogs and cats. Since obesity is an underlying factor in the disease, keeping your cat or dog trim and healthy may help prevent diabetes.

Common signs of diabetes in your pet include increased water consumption and frequency of urination. Weight loss despite a large appetite may also occur. Left uncontrolled, diabetes can become a life-threatening condition for your pet. Failure to treat diabetes causes elevated blood sugar levels leading to dehydration and body chemistry disorders that can eventually cause coma and death.

Treatment of diabetes usually involves giving your pet medications. Most diabetic pets require two daily injections of insulin to control blood glucose levels. Your veterinarian can train you in proper injection techniques to make the experience more comfortable for you and your pet.

CANCER IN PETS

Almost half of all dogs over 10 years old will develop some type of cancer. Certain breeds, such as Boxers and Golden Retrievers, are more prone to tumors and should be watched more closely. Cancer occurs when abnormal cells grow uncontrolled in the body. The result is tumors that may lead to serious problems.

Since cancer is such a difficult disease, not all signs definitely point to cancer or rule it out. Blood work may help in diagnosis but most cancers cannot be identified in the blood chemistry panel. Advanced testing may be needed. Some of the more common signs are:

growths on the body
areas that are swollen and continue to grow
sores that will not heal
weight loss
changes in appetite
difficulty swallowing, eating or breathing
decrease in activity level or stamina
lameness or stiffness
difficulty urinating and defecating

Routine physical exams and notations of all lumps and bumps are essential.

AGING AND OUR PETS

While 7 years may not seem like old age for your pet, he/she is considered a senior citizen. Sure, your pet may be just as active as ever, but his/her body is beginning to undergo changes. To increase the length and quality of your pets life, it is important to recognize these changes before advanced disabilities are present.

Some factors associated with aging are not controllable but there are some factors that you can control. Things to look out for in your senior pets are:

Weight Control: older, less active animals have a tendency to gain weight. Also, weight loss can be a sign of systemic illness.

Oral Health: It is more important than ever for your pet to have healthy teeth and gums.

Periodontal disease and gingivitis will make your pets other organs work harder

Sensory Changes: Most animals will adapt to decreases in vision and hearing very well, but you may need to change some routines to keep your pet safe.

Disease of Internal Organs: complete health assessments are necessary to recognize problems early so that they may be managed.

Decreased Activity: Exercise is important to all our pets, but playtime and walks may need to be modified to meet your pet's tolerance level.

If you notice changes in your pet's appearance or behavior discuss these symptoms with your veterinarian. Small problems can quickly become serious in our senior pets. Blood work, urinalysis, radiographs and ultrasound are diagnostic tools that may be used in evaluating your pet's health. Pets are living longer lives than ever before. Our medical staff is dedicated to helping your pet's golden years be happy.

Cognitive Dysfunction—Alzheimer's in Dogs

Dogs suffer from some of the same problems as people do when they get older. Stiff joints, graying hair and an overall slowing down is quite normal for canines as they age. In older dogs, sudden confusion and personality changes are not normal and may be signs of cognitive dysfunction.

What is cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS) exactly? It is comparable to Alzheimer's disease in people. CDS is a degeneration of the brain and the nervous system caused by physical changes in the brain and of the brain chemicals. These changes affect cognitive abilities in dogs and that is what changes their behavior.

Here are some signs to look out for related to cognitive dysfunction:

- ◆ House soiling
- ◆ Staring at walls or into space
- ◆ Withdrawing from activities with the family
- ◆ Sleeping more during the day
- ◆ Pacing or wandering aimlessly
- ◆ Sleeping less during the night
- ◆ Difficulty learning new tasks or routes
- ◆ Frequent trembling / shaking
- ◆ Ignoring known commands
- ◆ Decreased activity
- ◆ Becoming lost in familiar places (home or yard)
- ◆ Not responding to name
- ◆ Getting stuck in familiar places (corners or behind furniture)
- ◆ Having trouble finding the door or going to the hinge side of the door
- ◆ Not recognizing family members or familiar people

Sometimes other illnesses can have some of the same symptoms as CDS, such as kidney problems, hypothyroidism, arthritis, and hearing or vision loss. So if your pets' veterinarian suspects CDS he or she can perform a physical and neurological exam, and blood and urine tests to eliminate these other conditions. So far, there are no cures for cognitive dysfunction. Veterinarians are not sure if older cats suffer from CDS.

If you think that your dog suffers from cognitive dysfunction feel free to ask your pets veterinarian for their opinion.

HYPERTHYROIDISM AND YOUR CAT

Hyperthyroidism is a common disease of older cats and frequently goes unrecognized until the disease is advanced. But, this is a treatable disease either through medication, surgery, radiation therapy or diet.

Signs of a hyperthyroid cat are usually drinking and urinating excessively. These cats also are losing weight even though they are eating well. Many times these signs are thought to be due to “old age” but are signs of a serious disease process. Other signs can include vomiting and diarrhea, behavior changes, hyperactivity and vocalization. Some cats do the opposite and stop eating and are lethargic.

Hyperthyroidism is a treatable disease. Commonly, cats are given Methimazole, a medication to decrease to thyroid hormone levels. This medication is life long and needs to be monitored through frequent blood work. Other options include removing the thyroid gland surgically, radiation therapy can be done to decrease to thyroid hormone levels or diet change.