



# Paw Talk



A professional publication for the clients of East Valley Animal Clinic

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## Tea Tree Oils ...can be dangerous for your pet

It is becoming more and more common for natural oils to be used on our pets as they become more popular for us. While there are some benefits to using them, there are also some concerns.

One of the most common essential oils that is used on pets is tea tree oil, otherwise known as Melaleuca oil. It is often used for its antibacterial and antifungal properties. It can be found in over the counter pet shampoos and ear cleaners. In very small amounts, dogs and cats can tolerate tea tree oil. Most products formulated for animals are around a 1% concentration, which is not harmful. However, in higher concentrations tea tree oil can be  
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## Mom, I'm bored.

If you have kids, you have probably heard these words before. But if your dog could talk, would he say the same thing? What are you doing to stimulate his mind and body? There are many activities, sports and games that you can play with your dog to enrich his world.

The most popular and well-known sport is agility. In agility, the dog navigates a course of obstacles, including jumps, weave poles and even a teeter totter. Another sport is flyball, where the dog runs, collects a tennis ball and returns to its owner.

Erica, one of our technicians, has introduced her dog to the sport of shed hunting. Toby is being trained to search for antlers that deer naturally shed. It gives the dog something to hunt, gets you outside with your dog and gives you both some exercise. Minnesota just happens to be the home of the World Shed Dog Hunting Championship.

Another fun and growing sport is canine nose work, where dogs are taught to search for specific scents. Visit [www.K9Nosework.com](http://www.K9Nosework.com) to learn more. You can also visit [www.AKC.org/events](http://www.AKC.org/events) to learn about a number of dog sports and activities, including herding, lure coursing, tracking, earth dog and more.

You don't have to leave your home to keep your dog entertained. Even purchasing a food toy for your dog can give them stimulation and doesn't require you to get off the couch!

Boredom can lead to behavioral problems in dogs. Dog sports are a terrific way to engage your dog's mind and body. They also help build the bond you have with your pet as you learn and have fun together. No dog is too old to learn something new. Why not try a beginner class in a new sport with your furry four-footed best friend?



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## The Digestive System

The digestive system is the collection of organs responsible for digestion of food and elimination of waste from the bodies of mammals.

The digestive tract is essentially one long tube. Food enters the mouth and moves through the esophagus to the stomach. There it mixes with digestive juices and is churned into a soupy mixture called chyme, which then enters the small intestine, where the majority of nutrient absorption occurs. Next is the large intestine, also known as the colon or bowel, then to the rectum and out through the anal canal. The liver, gallbladder and pancreas are accessory organs in the digestive process.

There are many things that can affect the digestive system, and the initial symptoms are often similar regardless of the complexity of the condition. Your veterinarian has to be a detective, using physical examination, laboratory tests and your astute observations about the history of the problem to determine the cause.

A few common causes for GI problems include dietary indiscretion (eating the wrong thing), foreign body ingestion, food allergies, parasites, pancreatitis, bacteria and viruses.

Vomiting, diarrhea and constipation are the most common signs of a problem. Other signs may include flatulence, abdominal pain (sometimes shown with a hunched back), rapid breathing (which can be a sign of pain and distress), blood or mucous in the stool, weight loss, changes in appetite, weakness and lethargy.

Healthy digestion is essential for all animals' wellbeing. While many digestive upsets clear up within a few days, those that do not can have a significant impact on your pet's health. Monitor to your pet's eating and toileting habits, and be aware of the danger signs.



## Megacolon

Constipation—the inability to easily empty the bowel, is a common problem in cats. Prolonged constipation can lead to a condition known as megacolon, in which the bowel enlarges beyond its normal diameter as a result of the accumulation of too much waste.

The large intestine, also known as the colon or the bowel, extracts water from feces before they are eliminated from the body. When an animal is constipated, the feces become hard and dry. Severe constipation is known as “obstipation,” and can block the passage of both feces and gas through the colon.

As waste products accumulate, the bowel enlarges beyond its normal diameter. As it stretches, the muscles lose their motility, meaning they have even less ability to contract and push waste through. This can result in an irreversible condition where the body is unable to eliminate waste.

Megacolon can happen to felines of any breed, sex or age, but is most common in older male cats. It's not common in dogs but can happen in them as well.

Megacolon can be congenital, meaning it exists from birth; acquired, meaning it is caused by another condition; or idiopathic, meaning the cause is unknown. Acquired megacolon can be a result of many things, such as ingestion of a foreign body, lack of exercise, muscular disease, metabolic disease, dietary/nutritional causes, and litter box issues.

Signs of megacolon may include constipation, obstipation, small, hard stool, straining to eliminate, infrequent elimination, vomiting and loss of appetite. Megacolon is a painful condition and can be fatal, so if you see signs, don't hesitate to bring your cat to your veterinarian.

If your cat does suffer from megacolon, your veterinarian's physical examination will reveal a hard colon and fecal impaction. Other tests may be recommended, including blood work, x-rays (especially with contrast study) and ultrasound.

Treatment of constipation and megacolon depends on the severity and the underlying cause (if known). Mild cases sometimes respond well to a diet change, where more fiber is added, and the use of a stool softener. More severe cases may require the hardened feces to be evacuated from the bowel using enemas. Never attempt to give your cat an enema at home! Most cats must be anesthetized for enemas, and human products such as Fleet enemas may contain substances which are toxic to cats.

Your veterinarian may prescribe cisapride, which is a drug that increases the motility in the intestinal tract. Surgery is typically a last resort.

Prevention isn't always possible, but there are many things you can do to reduce the risk of your cat suffering from megacolon. Maintain a healthy body weight, be sure your cat gets exercise, feed a quality diet and always provide clean fresh water.

Clean the litterbox daily so you can effectively monitor the regularity of your cat's bowel movements, and pay attention if the stool seems hard and small. Cats with “litterbox issues” are more prone to megacolon, so talk to your veterinarian to try to figure out why those issues exist and how to resolve them.





# IBD

Inflammatory bowel disease, or IBD, is a condition that can affect cats, dogs and other animals, including humans. IBD is not a single disease; the term encompasses a group of disorders that cause chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, and may occur anywhere from the stomach to the rectum. (Some definitions of IBD include only the small and large intestines, and refer to inflammation of the stomach as *gastritis*.) The walls of the GI tract thicken as a result of an infiltration of inflammatory cells, reducing the ability to properly absorb nutrients and move food through the GI tract.

IBD may be the result of other conditions, such as parasites, bacterial infection, or a food allergy, but it is often idiopathic, meaning the cause cannot be identified.

Symptoms of IBD vary, and they may come and go. Signs might include chronic, intermittent vomiting if the inflammation is in the stomach or small intestine, and chronic diarrhea which might contain blood or mucous if the inflammation is in the colon. Lethargy, depression, loss of appetite, weight loss and painful abdomen may also be noted.

If your veterinarian suspects IBD, a range of tests may be performed, including physical examination, blood work, fecal exam, x-ray and ultrasound. The definitive way to diagnose IBD is through a biopsy, which must be obtained either through surgery or endoscopy. The biopsy helps determine the types of inflammatory cells involved, which may affect treatment.

Any age and breed of dog or cat can develop IBD, but it is more common in middle age and senior pets. Certain breeds of dogs, including Basenjis, Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers and Boxers are known to be susceptible to specific types of IBD.

IBD is a challenging condition to treat, and there is no single "right answer" for treatment in dogs or cats. Changing the diet may be the first approach, using a novel protein (one that your pet has never eaten before), or a hydrolyzed diet. A hydrolyzed diet is specially formulated so that the protein molecules are so small that the immune system typically does not consider them to be a threat.

Your veterinarian may try antibiotics, such as metronidazole, which also has antiprotozoal effects and therefore will help eliminate some parasite infections. Corticosteroids such as prednisone may be used to reduce the inflammation in the gut. For many pets, a combination of therapies may provide the most relief.

It's worth noting that IBD is not the same as irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS. While the symptoms may be the same, IBS is typically caused by psychological stress, while IBD is caused by a physiological problem.

Inflammatory bowel disease is typically not curable, but in most cases, it can be managed so that your pet can be comfortable.



"A LARGE PIZZA WITH PEPPERONI, SAUSAGE, AN OLD SOCK, SOME KITCHEN TRASH AND A SQUEAKY RUBBER PORK CHOP."

## Urgent GI Signs

There are many ailments that can affect the digestive system. Pets usually recover quickly from mild GI upsets, and an occasional hairball or loose stool is not something that should cause alarm. Some gastrointestinal problems are life-threatening, however, and minutes can make a difference for survival. If you're unsure, don't hesitate to call your veterinarian to ask whether you should bring your pet in for treatment.

- Bloat—also known as gastric dilation and volvulus, is a life-threatening condition caused by a buildup of gas. It can cause the stomach to twist, cutting off blood supply, leading to shock and death. Signs may include unproductive vomiting, or vomiting which produces only mucous or foam, anxiety or restlessness, a distended abdomen that may feel tight like a drum, abdominal discomfort, pacing, and refusing to sit or lie down. If you suspect bloat, seek emergency veterinary care immediately.
- Persistent vomiting or diarrhea, with or without blood
- Severe pain (a hunched position, rapid breathing, rapid heart rate, wincing if you touch the abdomen)
- Straining to defecate
- Poison or toxic ingestion—signs of poisoning vary widely depending on the type of toxin. Along with nausea and vomiting, symptoms may include weakness, neurological signs (including uncoordinated movement, tremors or seizures) and a rapid heart rate.
- Refusal to eat or drink—While not an emergency for many dogs and cats, it might be for yours. If your dog usually does a better job cleaning up than your vacuum but suddenly decides he won't eat, it's probably a sign that something isn't right. Refusal to eat or drink could be a sign of a foreign body obstruction. Depending on the location, a foreign object could pierce the gut wall, leading to infection and shock.

**"They motivate us to play, be affectionate, seek adventure and be loyal."**

– Tom Hayden





Laura and her kitty, S.A.

# A Fond Farewell to Two Wonderful Technicians

We are sad to say goodbye to two very special technicians from East Valley Animal Clinic. **Laura** started working at East Valley 14 years ago, in October 2002. Laura has been the inventory manager at our clinic and she has been a wonderful, caring technician for both our patients and their owners. Laura has always had passion for health and fitness and has decided to pursue that interest with her own business. She is also weightlifting coach in Northfield and is taking her knowledge to help high school students be their best.

**Lindsey** started at East Valley Animal Clinic in July, 2005 as a veterinary technician intern and was hired on afterwards because of her skills and her kind heart and easy spirit. Lindsey also has a passion for health. She is a yoga instructor and is studying nutrition. Lindsey has decided to follow her heart and

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Lindsey

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her dreams which have taken her to the beautiful state of Colorado.

Both Laura and Lindsey are wonderful technicians and awesome women to work with. We miss them both, but are so happy for them to fulfill their dreams. We wish them both much success and happiness!

## TEA TREE OILS *continued from pg. 1*

toxic, and even fatal to dogs and cats. It can be absorbed through the skin or licked off when your pet grooms themselves. Ingesting a toxic amount of tea tree oil can cause stumbling or even the inability to walk. Tea tree oil can cause liver failure, which can be fatal.

Citrus oils are other popular essential oils that can be toxic at higher concentrations. They are most commonly found in high concentrations in bug repellents and potpourri. Citrus oils can cause neurological problems, and can lead to seizures.

Other essential oils may not cause the dramatic symptoms like tea tree oil and citrus oils, but they should all be used with caution in pets. Many essential oils in the concentrated amounts can create sores in the mouth, GI irritation and skin irritation. It is always best to check with your veterinarian prior to using a product with natural oils to ensure that it is not going to cause a problem.