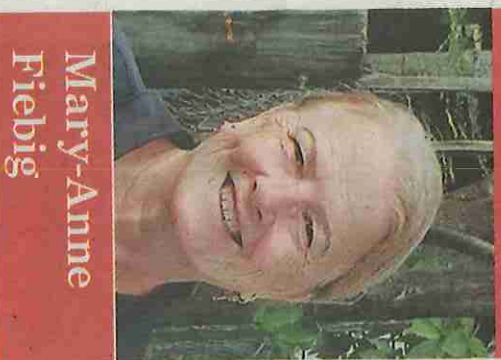


ANIMALS FIJI

Animals Get Breast Cancer Too!



Opinion



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October is breast cancer awareness month for humans – but did you know that dogs, cats, and other animals also get breast cancer?

It is called mammary cancer in domestic animals, as the mammary glands produce the milk to feed their young.

We hear a lot about breast (mammary) cancer in women, but many people don't realise it is common in female dogs who are not desexed (spayed). In fact, 2per cent of unspayed female dogs will get mammary tumours during their lifetime and 50per cent will become malignant (cancerous).

Mammary tumours are also common in cats, but the difference is that in nearly 90per cent of unspayed female cats that develop mammary tumours, these tumours will become malignant.

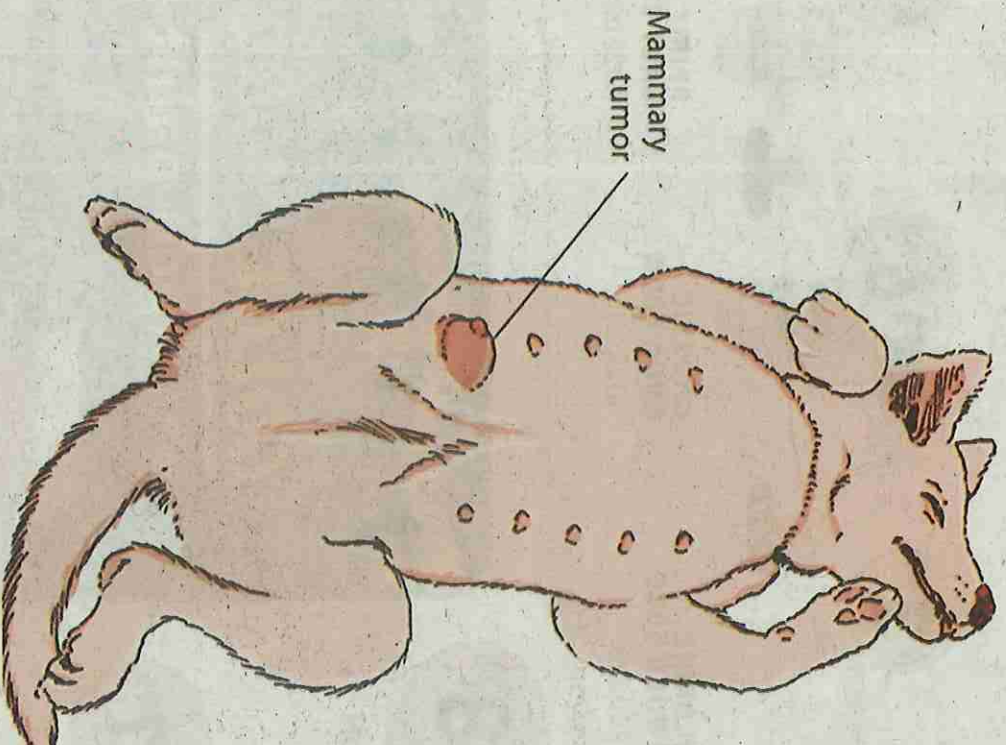
As with humans, mammary tumours are more common in females than males, but males can be affected too but much less frequently.

While mammary tumours are also most common in dogs and cats, it can occur less frequently in other domestic or farm animals, including rats, mice, and even larger animals like horses and goats.

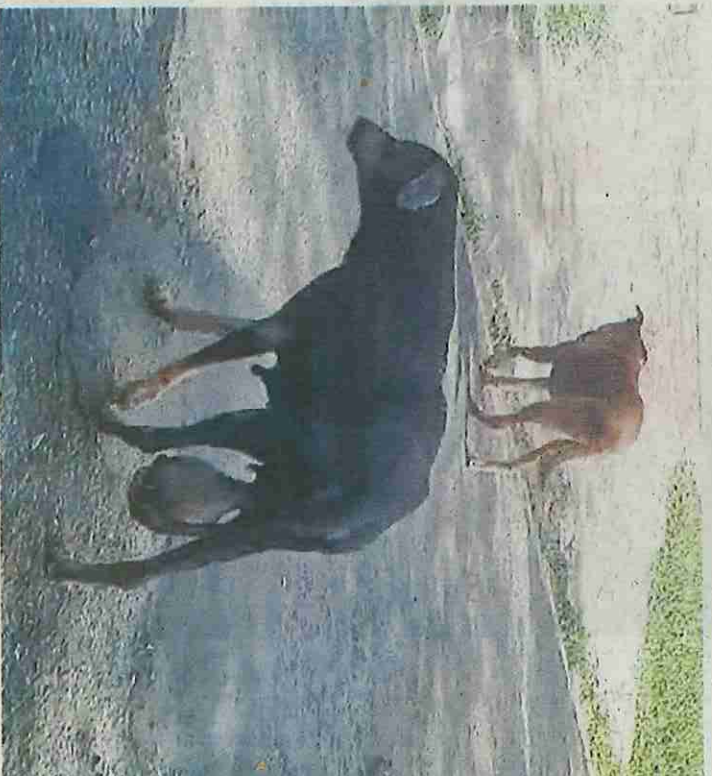
A key factor in reducing the risk of mammary tumours is desexing or sterilizing known as spaying in females or neutering in males. This is best done before the first heat cycle, usually before dogs reach six months or 46 months for cats. Spaying is effective because it reduces the hormones that trigger cancer cells. Always check with your veterinary clinic for advice on the best time for your animal.

Puppies

Desexing a female puppy before her first heat cycle (fertile time), which in dogs begins soon after the animal is six months old, means the chance of mammary tumours to almost 0per cent. If she has one heat cycle before desexing, the risk increases to about 7per cent, which is still low. With more heat cycles, the risk rises to 25per cent (one in four)! It is good to know that spaying at



Mammary tumour drawing.



any age in dogs helps prevent tumours in dogs, even if your dog is at a higher risk. Animals Fiji offers puppy desexing as young as 10-12 weeks or at a minimum weight of 3kg, which is in line with the Association of Shelter Veterinarians.

Kittens

Having your female kitten desexed before she is 46 months old means that the chance of getting a mammary tumour is 9per cent. If you desex her before she turns one, the risk increases to 15per cent. Desexing after two years old increases the risk to around 90per cent - that is 9 out of every 10 cats will be affected, after that, there is no change - it remains at 90per cent.

Having kittens doesn't change the chances of getting mammary tumours. As with puppies, Animals Fiji will desex kittens as young as 10-12 weeks or at a minimum weight of 1kg. Mammary tumours are less com-

TAKE NOTE:

■ If you are worried about your pet's health, make an appointment with your Veterinary Clinic. Animals Fiji helps animals all around Fiji, with clinics in Savusavu, Labasa, Nadi and Lautoka, and they also hold outreach clinics in other areas.

■ If you want to support Animals Fiji in their work or to find out more about Animals Fiji's services, contact their Savusavu Clinic (+679) 998 6253 or Nadi Clinic (+679) 993 6647 or visit their website at www.animalsfiji.org.



Animals Fiji staff carrying puppies.



Gysee with mammary tumour (left) and Gysee after treatment (right).

mon in cats than dogs - but they are more likely to be cancerous.

Signs of mammary cancer

Mammary cancers show up as tumours. These tumours are usually hard lumps that are not usually there. These tumours or lumps will occur along the mammary chain of glands under the skin and go from the chest to the groin area.

Female dogs typically have five sets of mammary glands, while female cats have four. Usually, the mammary glands are soft and pliable - especially toward the hind legs. There should be no firm lumps. Tumours or hard lumps in the area can be cancerous (malignant) or non-cancerous (benign). If they are cancerous, it is serious as they may spread to other parts of the body and cause your animal to become very sick.

If you notice a tumour or anything unusual, such as swelling, discharge from the nipple when she is not feed-

ing, or any alterations in the size or shape of the area, it is essential that you go to your veterinary clinic as soon as possible. They can test to see what type of tumour it is and then suggest treatment. Treatment may include surgery to remove the tumours, and in severe cases, the clinic may recommend chemotherapy or radiation. They will discuss all the options with you, and it is up to you to choose what you are comfortable with and can afford.

It is worth noting that tumours usually appear in both cats and dogs at around eight years of age, so it is essential to regularly check your pet after six years of age.

As always, in any disease - the earlier you find and treat it - the better chance there will be a good result. How your veterinary clinic decides on treatment for your pet depends on the tumour type and whether it has spread. Each case will be different.

Source: Animals Fiji