

# CRITTERS!

Newsletter of  
South Huntsville Veterinary Hospital  
Winter 2025



## A Few Minutes with Dr. Wesley

Some remarkable new veterinary medications and treatments are available, including cancer vaccines for pets. A treatment for melanoma not only helps the body fight off the cancer, but prevents recurrence as well.

There is also a new tumor treatment that can be administered by a primary care veterinarian.



Your dog can now wear a fitness tracker that monitors heart rate, the progress of a therapy, or a specific condition.

The identifying microchip that is common for dogs and cats is available in horses too. There are even microchips that can measure the animal's temperature as well as serving as an identifier.

For cats, there is a drug to treat feline infectious peritonitis that has previously been restricted and extremely difficult to obtain. Most cats are exposed to coronavirus early in life and at times this virus can mutate and cause the disease known as FIP (feline infectious peritonitis).

Previously this disease was almost uniformly fatal. There are specific clinical signs; diagnosis is made via a blood test, imaging, and a further verification by a sample that can be sent to Auburn's College of Veterinary Medicine. The new treatment can be administered by a primary care veterinarian, and the recovery rate from the anti-viral drug is 80%. The drug is called GS-441524

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### Ask The Veterinarian

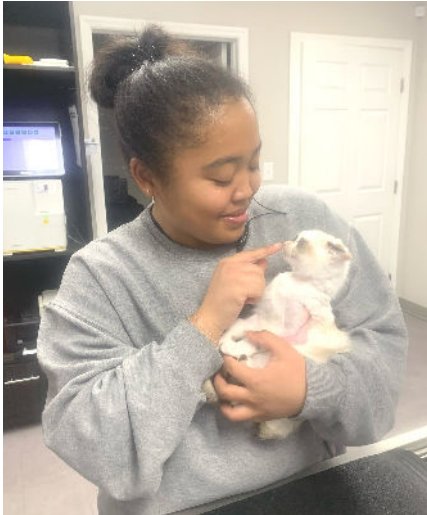
Honey asks:

We have a new friend who lives in another town and comes to stay with us quite often. She says she has always been afraid of dogs, and wants us to keep our dog locked up in another part of the house when she visits. Our dog is friendly and well-behaved, doesn't shed, and weighs 14 pounds. He doesn't growl at people and loves everyone, and everyone—except this friend—loves him back. Can anything be done to help someone overcome the fear of dogs?

Dr. W. says:

As with any fear, the individual has to want to overcome it. Sometimes the fear results from a bad experience with a dog, and sometimes the fear exists without an obvious cause.

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## Naughty Dog Fergus

Hope you had a great time over the holidays. I was a seasoned pro this time, not like last year when I thought the Christmas tree was—well, to me it was an understandable mistake; I just thought Charlie and Honey had brought in a tree for me for times when the weather was too bad to go for a walk. Now I know—for reasons I still don't entirely understand—they just bring in a tree to put all kinds of lights and shiny things on it.

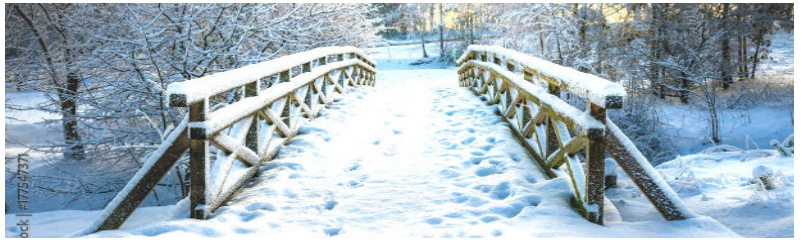
There were some other new things that happened this past Christmas, but Chaz and Jack, Charlie and Honey's two sons, came to visit just like they did last year. The big difference was that this time, Chaz brought a friend, and even before they arrived, Honey was very excited about it. She bought a lot of new things for the guest room, and kept asking Charlie if he liked the new towels, the new quilt, and the new curtains.

I could tell that Charlie wasn't very interested, but he made an effort to sound involved. "Nice colors. What do you call them?" Honey answered, "They're called 'earth tones.'" "Oh, like dirt?" he said, laughing. For some reason, Honey didn't find that funny. I have no opinion, because mostly all I can see are some yellows and blues.

Finally, the big day came, and Chaz introduced everyone to Halley. Well, to everyone but me. I was excited to see Chaz again, remembering all the fun we had had last Christmas playing with toys and growling at each other. This time, though, he barely said hello to me, and finally he actually told me sternly to "settle down."



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## Adopting an Adult Dog

People adopt adult dogs for many reasons. Sometimes the dog “ends up” adopted due to family circumstances, but ideally, people have a choice, and also ideally, all members of the household have agreed ahead of time about what they’re looking for in size, age, breed/mix, and energy level.

Choosing an adult dog rather than a puppy generally means the dog won’t need house-training and will be accustomed life in a home.

However, every “re-homed” adult dog has a history. Even if the shelter has been able to give you some idea of a dog’s background, there are unchanging aspects of the dog’s personality that may only appear over time.

Adjusting to life in a new home is stressful. Anyone who has ever relocated, whether across the country or across town, knows this, and your adopted adult dog will have the same adjustment.

A predictable routine and regular training create a bond between the dog and his new family. Being attentive to the dog will also reveal any predispositions or triggers that the dog might have.

Consistency within the household will reassure your dog of his place. It may be a couple of weeks or months before the dog is fully comfortable in your home.

Within the first weeks after adopting, take your dog to your primary care vet for an assessment of how the transition is going. This will also help the dog become comfortable riding in the car and visiting the vet.

If your family is going to travel without the dog in the future, it’s a good idea to arrange a “test run” with whatever care situation you plan, whether a house/dog sitter or boarding out. The dog will learn that you are not abandoning him, and that will make it easier on both you and the dog when you have to leave town. (However, in the dog’s first few months in your home, leaving him with someone else is not recommended.)

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### Ask The Veterinarian (cont’d)

If an individual wants to overcome the fear of dogs, there are therapy groups that can help. Education, including learning to “read” a dog’s behavior, will help overcome fear, and simply spending time with well-trained dogs will be greatly reassuring.

Having a controlled environment in which to create a good experience is a vitally important factor, but as with any fear, the most important aspect is the desire to overcome it.

## Adopting an Adult Dog

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If you see signs of aggression, first see to your own safety, and give the dog time and space to settle down. The shelter personnel (or previous owner) should have told you if they had seen any sign of aggression and what might have triggered it, but if not, it's worth a call to ask.

If you don't have the experience to know what to do about a dog's aggressive behavior, a consultation with a trainer or your veterinarian can help you understand and deal with the cause of the aggressive response (which may surprise you). An incident of aggression does not mean you've chosen "the wrong dog" or have a "bad dog." Giving your dog a forever home means you are willing to learn how to respond in a way that avoids inciting a spiral into habitually negative behavior. When you learn how to prevent the scenario from worsening, you will ease both the dog's and your own fears, and ultimately you will have a peaceable, obedient dog.

Investing in formal training can help with other undesirable behaviors. The most lovable and easygoing dog might still need some "fine tuning" to fit into your family, and a trainer can give you the confidence to clearly communicate your wishes. Here are some trainers we recommend:

Island Dog Training 256/270-7762

Kind Hearts Dog Training 256/881-5700

Muttly Manners and More 256/755-0386

## Naughty Dog Fergus

(cont'd)

After that, I went back to my corner of the sofa. Honey and Charlie took Halley to the guest room to show her where she could put her things. Chaz and Jack were back in their old room, getting settled. When Honey and Charlie came back to the living room, I ran down the hall to say hello to Halley. I thought we could have some time together, but she was not happy to see me.

"Please go away," she said. I stopped just inside the door and wagged my tail a little. "Please, please go away," she said again.

Well, no one had ever said anything like that to me. Pretty much everyone who knows me likes me a lot. The neighbors like me, and little children like me, and everyone who comes to the house says something nice to me. And of course, Honey and Charlie are crazy about me. I thought Chaz and I became best buds last Christmas, and Jack, who didn't play with me much, always liked to take long walks with me. Even people who just see me say things like, "What an adorable little dog!"

Well, there have been a lot of things about living with humans that I've just had to go along with, so I waited to see if I could figure out what was going on with Halley. Of course, that meant no playing tug of war and growling with Chaz. Jack still took me for long walks, though, which was nice. And Charlie and Honey seemed to notice that Chaz didn't pay any attention to me, and they were especially affectionate, which helped.

**Critters!** is a publication of South Huntsville Veterinary Hospital.  
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