

# Fleas



## Fleas

Fleas can be a serious problem to both dogs and cats. Apart from the obvious discomfort from flea bites, fleas suck blood, carry other parasites and can also lead to a serious skin problem known as flea allergy dermatitis (FAD).

Flea allergy dermatitis is the most common skin complaint we see in dogs and cats and is due to an allergy to flea saliva. ONE flea bite is enough to initiate the problem, so your pet may be suffering from flea-related dermatitis even if you think it has no fleas.

Flea control for your pet is important **all year round**.

## The flea's life story

When an **adult flea** first jumps onto your pet, it must have a blood meal before breeding and laying eggs. Having done this, it can then lay up to 50 eggs a day and **several hundred** in its short lifetime. These eggs fall into the bedding, carpet or grass, concentrating in the areas where your pet spends most of its time.

Within a few days, a small, hairy **larva** hatches from the egg, feeds on organic material in its immediate environment and then after two moults develops into a **pupa** (cocoon) in which the new adult flea forms. This pupa provides great protection to the immature flea, hidden deep in the carpet or grass, and under the right environmental conditions (warmth, humidity and vibration) will develop into a new adult flea. The new adult flea detects a passing animal and jumps on, starting the life cycle again.

Flea-free animals do not pick up significant numbers of fleas through direct contact with infested animals but through contact with an infested **environment**.

Fleas do tend to be a bigger problem in warmer weather as they breed much faster, so there's a lot more of them! In the heat and humidity of summer, the whole life cycle can take as little as three weeks. But the warm winter home also offers a perfect environment for flea reproduction and environmental contamination. Home heating during winter months enables the flea life cycle to continue to produce new populations of fleas, dismissing the commonly held idea that dogs and cats do not need flea treatment in the winter months.

## Signs of flea infestation on your pet include:

- itching and biting in dogs, or simply grooming in cats
- flea faeces in fur
- animals may develop hair loss and dermatitis, often around the rump and tail base
- fleas can sometimes be seen running through your pet's fur, often also around the base of the tail or across the thinner hair on the tummy.

## How do you stop fleas?

For effective flea control, you need to:

- control the immature stages in the environment (the most important consideration)
- kill the adult fleas on your pet(s)
- treat **all** dogs and cats in the household, even if they don't appear to have fleas
- maintain flea control **all year round** – prevention is better than cure.

## What do you use?

Although the array of different flea products can be variable and confusing, using the right approach for your individual situation can mean the difference between success and failure. There are several flea preventatives on the market; be aware that **flea collars, powders and shampoos will NOT be effective in controlling a flea problem**, as they do not provide sustained control for a long enough period.

There are several spot-on flea products available such as Advantage and Frontline, as well as combination parasite spot-ons such as Advocate and Revolution. Please contact our clinic for advice on flea control or if you are unsure whether the flea control you have been using is suitable.