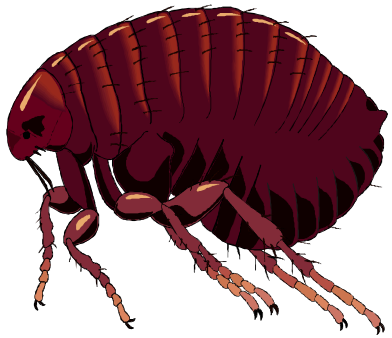
Fleas and their Control



The adult flea is a flattish, match head size, chestnut coloured insect that can be found scurrying through the coat of dogs and cats. Fleas are extremely common, particularly in the latter part of the summer.

Importance: The flea is the most common cause of skin allergy in both dogs and cats. Although the usual flea is the cat flea, all fleas can feed on other species, including man. The flea is also the source of the most common tapeworm of cats and dogs.

Life Cycle: The adult flea lives for some two weeks, jumping on and off and feeding intermittently. During this time it lays about twenty eggs per day onto the ground. These develop on to larvae, a minute caterpillar stage that burrows way from light to continue development to the adult. Should eggs be dropped in the home the larva will penetrate deep into carpets and soft furnishings. At any one time more than 95% of fleas are eggs and larvae. Whole cycle can take 3 weeks to many months depending on conditions.

Signs: First signs are often the irritation, followed by either finding fleas themselves or their faeces. Flea faeces appear like specks of coal dust on the coat, which when moistened turn blood red. They will be found in the common feeding sites, particularly lower back and around the neck.

Treatment: Effective treatment must deal with both the developing larval stage(95% of the population) and the feeding adult(5%). There are many products for both, including:

Larvae in the home:

Acclaim Plus - aerosol, insecticide + insect hormone that prevents larval development, lasts 7 months

Program- tablet/suspension given to dog/cat stops flea eggs hatching. Non-toxic to mammals easy to administer. Repeat monthly.

Adults on the pet:

Frontline - lasts 2-3 months, low toxicity, pump spray easier with cats

Baths/rinses- last 7-14 days, good but pet needs bathing

Powders- less effective, since powder falls out of the coat

Flea collars- not very effective particularly with long haired or large animals.

Spot-ons (Frontline, Advantage) systemic insecticides - overcome previous concers with toxicity of organophosphates. Shed skin cells can control fleas in the environment.

The most effective flea control products currently available are *Frontline, Program & Advantage*

Treatment should precede flea development which starts when environmental temperatures exceed 10 degrees C and continue whilst central heating maintains indoor development. This is usually at least June to December.

The most effective treatments currently available are Frontline, Program and Advantage. With an existing flea infestation Acclaim should be added to the treatment.

Program is probably the single best preventative of flea allergy dermatitis.

Ticks Several species may affect dogs and cats, most commonly the hard tick Ixodes which attaches to the host, growing into a whitish, rounded object, the size of a fingernail.

Signs: usually noticed incidentally, often thought to be a cyst. Occasionally ticks cause irritation.

Treatment: careful removal with fine forceps to extract the mouthparts and prevent the formation of a skin lump. A tick bath will kill any others.

Other Skin Parasites

Mange Several microscopic mites can cause mange in dogs (and to a lesser extent cats).Most common are Sarcops, Cheytiella and Demodex.

Signs: Sarcops causes extreme irritation, Cheytiella is commonly found on youngsters and results in copious dandruff and itching, whilst Demodex more usually causes hair loss and skin infection. Both may cover much of the body. Mites can usually be identified in skin scrapings.

Treatment : An appropriate bath will usually be curative. For Demodex particularly, injectable agents may be needed.

Ear Mites: Very common parasites of puppies and kittens, just visible to the naked eye, that inhabit the ear canal.

Signs: Ear irritation, copious dark waxy discharge.

Treatment Insecticidal ear drops for three weeks - the duration of two life cycles.

Roundworms Principally Toxocara Canis

All our pets will have parasites at some time. The best treatments are on prescription. If you suspect parasites use the best treatment available to see if symptoms are alleviated.

Worms

(dog) and Toxacara Cati (cat). The great majority of puppies and kittens are infected with larvae either before birth or from their mother's milk. Larvae pass from the intestine to the liver, thence to the lungs, to be coughed up and swallowed to continue development to the egg laying adult in the intestine. Eggs must undergo a period of maturation once passed before becoming infective, but are extremely resilient, being able to survive many months in the environment.

Importance: may cause weakness, anaemia, vomiting, diarrhoea and intestinal obstruction in the puppy or kitten. Should humans ingest mature larvae, usually canine, they may develop into migrating larvae, causing various immunilogical and vascular symptoms, and rarely blindness.

Treatment: All puppies and kittens should be wormed at least monthly, adults 2-4x yearly. Some treatments can kill larval stages, particularly *Panacur*, used for young puppies and pregnant bitches. Piperazine is widely used but of lower efficacy.

Tapeworms: All require an intermediate host for larval development. The most common is Dipylidium, whose larvae develop in the flea. The adult sheds whitish, motile segments the size of a rice grain, which may be seen wriggling on the perineum. These fall off, dry up and are ingested by flea larvae. The flea then carries the developing worm until swallowed by the grooming pet.

Importance: Tapeworms can cause intestinal disturbance and illthrift.

Treatment: More difficult than roundworms, proprietary treatments are often of low efficacy. Injectable *Droncit* is useful for cats, and tablets of *Drontal* are highly effective against both round and tapeworms for both dogs and cats.

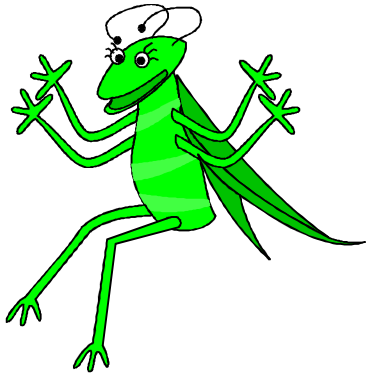
Toxoplasma

A unicellular parasite of cats, also able to infect many species, including dogs and man, as intermediate hosts. Cats become infected from hunting or eating uncooked meat. The organism multiplies in the intestine to release millions of oocysts (eggs) in the cat's faeces over a two week period. At any one time up to 30% of cats have antibodies to toxoplasma and 1% are shedding oocysts. The cat usually remains asymptomatic. Ingestion of oocysts by an intermediate host results in body tissue invasion with possible damage to muscle, brain, and the foetus of infected pregnant females.

Importance: Particularly to pregnant women, infection during pregnancy may result in foetal brain damage. Studies have failed to show an increased risk from contact with cats.

Treatment: Since the cat is usually asymptomatic, control depends on routine hygiene, special care should always be taken when handling cat litter trays and ensuring meat is well cooked. Antibiotics can be used for treating sick cats.

Parasites and your Pet



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