

Fleas and Your Pet

Fleas are one of the most common causes of itching in household pets. The most common signs of a flea problem in dogs and cats are scratching, biting or chewing the skin on their legs, back, tail, and head. When fleas bite, they release saliva, which causes an immediate itch response. Rarely, dogs and cats can develop an allergy to this saliva, which causes them to remain itchy for weeks after the last fleabite. If your pet has long or dark colored fur, you may not see the actual fleas. By using a fine brush or comb, you may find small black flakes, which are the feces of the flea, also known as flea dirt. If you put a spot of flea dirt on moist paper, it dissolves and leaves a streak of blood. You may also notice small red bite marks on your own wrists or ankles.

Fleas go through different stages of development during their 3-4 week life cycle. They start as eggs, then develop into larva and then into the adult fleas that live on your animal. The fleas you see on your animal are constantly laying eggs, which fall off of your pet's hair onto the carpet, furniture and lawn. The eggs then turn into larvae, which burrow down into rugs and carpeting. The larvae like dark areas best, so they tend to move to areas under furniture. Treatment of fleas involves killing the fleas on your pet as well as treating the area where your pet lives. The goal is to prevent the laying of additional eggs and the hatching of new larvae.

TREATING YOUR PETS

There are a variety of products on the market for flea control. This is a list of the products we use most frequently:

Frontline Plus- This is a topical "spot-on" product, which is applied to the skin between your pet's shoulder blades. It can be used in animals as young as 8 weeks. The medication soaks into the oil layer of the skin and spreads out to kill fleas on all parts of your pet. Frontline will kill all life stages of the flea and also provides some protection against intestinal parasites. It remains effective for one month. Bathing and swimming should be avoided for 12 hours prior and 24 hours after application, however, these activities will not wash the product off after this time. Frontline should be applied for at least two consecutive months if fleas have been found on your pet. Frontline Plus is an excellent product to use to prevent flea infestations. It renders the fleas sterile thereby eliminating the laying of eggs in the environment.

Revolution- This topical liquid is applied just like Frontline and can be applied to pets as young as 6 weeks of age. It has the added benefit for outdoor pets of protecting against heartworm disease and intestinal parasites.

Capstar- This is a pill, which is given by mouth and will start killing the adult fleas on your pet within 30 minutes. The effects of this medication only last for 24 hours, so other medications must be combined with this product for good flea control.

Mycodex Shampoo- Using a good quality flea/tick shampoo can be a very effective start to your flea control program. This product only kills what it comes in contact with, so it will be necessary to combine this with other products.

Mycodex Spray- This is a spray-on product, which kills all life stages of fleas. It must be applied every three weeks to prevent re-infestation with fleas.

TREATING THE ENVIRONMENT

The most important part of ridding your house and yard of fleas is cleaning all areas where your pet lives. Focus on the areas where your pet spends most of his/her time since this is where there will be the greatest number of flea eggs and larvae.

Cleaning- Wash all of your pets bedding thoroughly. Vacuum furniture and floors, including baseboards, **every day** for the first week including underneath furniture and then throw away the vacuum bag. **Twice weekly** vacuuming of the entire house for the next **month** will help remove flea eggs and larvae, which may be lingering in the carpet. Wash/mop all hard surface floors in the house with a dilute bleach solution, again focusing on the areas where your pet spends most of his/her time.

Knockout- This is an area treatment spray which kills adult fleas on the furniture and carpet, and persists in the environment to kill eggs, larvae, and adults for up to 7 months. This product should be applied as directed on the label to all areas of the house where the pet spends time. It can also be used in the grass and leaves in your yard to help eliminate fleas outside. Due to weather conditions, the treatment of the yard may be less effective at times. **It is extremely important that you continue to clean and vacuum your house for at least 3 to 4 weeks beyond the initial flea treatment to remove the fleas that may have not been killed by the spray.**

OTHER FLEA PRODUCTS

There are many other flea products available which are not as effective as those listed above. The topical “spot-on” products, flea powders, dips, sprays or collars that are available at pet stores do not give reliable results since most fleas are resistant to these over-the-counter flea medications. We also do not recommend the use of alternative therapies such as garlic and ultrasonic collars for flea control.

If you have any questions regarding any of the above information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Visit us online at www.WhiteBearAnimalHospital.com.

WHITE BEAR ANIMAL HOSPITAL

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