



How to prevent fleas in dogs and cats



Although only small, fleas can cause a major problem in households. Classically most prevalent in Summer, we now see them all year round thanks to central heating. One flea can rapidly reproduce to form a whole population of up to 500 eggs, larvae and adult fleas, meaning prompt treatment to eradicate them is essential.

In the early stages fleas can often go unnoticed (even on pets with short white hair), therefore by the time they are detected, hundreds of eggs may be present in carpets and bedding, meaning elimination can be a real challenge. For this reason, prevention really is simpler, cheaper and far less itchy than cure!

Fleas feed on blood. They are not fussy as to whose blood they feed on, therefore will bite pets and people equally. The odd bite can be a nuisance, causing localised irritation and swelling; however some individuals are allergic to flea saliva, resulting in severe ulceration and even causing infections. In pets, this may present as scratching, multiple small scabs, sores and hair loss.

Fleas also have hidden dangers, for example they can transmit a tapeworm called *Dipylidium*, the most common worm to infect dogs and cats. Flea bites can also cause anaemia in animals with heavy infestations. In rabbits, fleas can spread Myxomatosis, a fatal disease endemic in this country (vaccination available).

The Life Cycle - Fleas living on the pet produce eggs which are continually shed wherever the animal goes, including in bedding and on carpets. Eventually, larvae hatch and feed on debris found on the floor. Once large enough, the larvae form a cocoon, within which they undergo development into an adult flea. Vibrations trigger the fleas to emerge, allowing them to jump straight on to their unsuspecting prey.

Other external parasites often requiring prevention and treatment include **Ticks**. These are also blood-suckers, but they latch on to us and our pets for days at a time, until they become engorged with blood. Although most commonly found in countryside areas, ticks can also inhabit urban parks and gardens. If you find a tick on your pet, please do not attempt to remove it without prior demonstration or use of a 'Tick Hook' because the mouth parts can be left behind, causing inflammation and infection. Ticks can also transmit diseases, one of the most notable being Lyme Disease caused by infection with *Borrelia* bacteria.

Treatment and Control

Various treatment formulations are available. We find the most effective and simple to apply is the spot-on preparation. Many spot-ons are available in both shops and Veterinary practices; however the active ingredients and efficiency can vary greatly. We recommend the use of prescription medications which have had rigorous testing to make sure they work both effectively and safely. A range of treatments are available:

Advocate – This product is available for dogs, cats and ferrets and is the one we tend to use most frequently. Advocate treats **adult fleas and larvae** when applied monthly. It also has the added benefit of treating **intestinal worms, lungworm, lice and mites**. Advocate does not treat ticks or tapeworms.

Advantix – A product for use in DOGS ONLY, this is a highly effective monthly treatment against **ticks and fleas**. Advantix is particularly useful for dogs travelling abroad as it also repels **sandflies** (which transmit a lethal disease called Leishmania), and dogs kept with horses as it repels **stable flies** and **mosquitoes**.

Advantage – A monthly treatment available for **fleas** in dogs, cats and rabbits. This is a basic low-cost product that does what it says on the pack.

Frontline – This product has been used for many years to prevent **fleas and ticks** in dogs and cats. Frontline still remains effective and is the only treatment available for ticks in cats. A newer product, **Frontline Combo**, also inhibits development of **flea eggs and larvae**.

It is also important **to treat the environment** to prevent hatching and development of flea eggs and larvae by:

- Washing all bedding
- Hoovering regularly
- Using environmental sprays such as:

R.I.P. Fleas – protects against fleas (adults, larvae and eggs), ticks and dust mites. Lasts up to 12 months.

Acclaim – kills fleas, ticks, dust mites, cockroaches, spiders and ants. Prevents re-infestation for up to 12 months.

Skoosh.- Kills fleas and prevents eggs from hatching. Contains no insecticides. Lasts 6 weeks.

