Feline Parasites: Compendium of Common Cat Parasites

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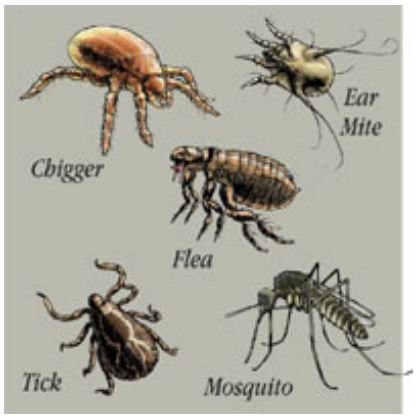
common cat parasites

Spot the signs of infection to protect your cat

The world is filled with parasites. Unfortunately, most are ready and willing to infest your cat. Many intestinal worms and external parasites can cause serious medical conditions and deadly diseases. But do you know what to look for when determining what type of parasite has infected your cat? Here are some examples:

Ear Mites



Mites can invade your cat's ears, spread to other areas of your cat's body, and infect other pets in your home. Infected animals will scratch around their ears and/or shake their heads. In severe cases, the ear canals will bleed. If left untreated permanent hearing loss can occur. To kill mites in the ear, use an ear miticide. Your veterinarian should examine the ear to make sure the eardrum is intact. A pyrethrin-based flea and tick topical will also kill mites that have spread over your cat's body.

Toxoplasma gondii

This parasite causes toxoplasmosis. *T. gondii* is spread via cat feces, uncooked meat and raw goat milk. In humans, toxoplasmosis can cause abortion and congenital defects in unborn children, so pregnant women are advised to avoid litter box cleaning. *T. gondii* can also cause a serious, sometimes fatal, disease in children and adults. Signs of feline toxoplasmosis are nonspecific including: fever, loss of appetite, depression, and pneumonia. To help protect your cat, do not feed him raw meat or bones, allow him to scavenge in the garbage, or hunt wild mice and birds. Also, clean litter boxes daily and regularly wash them with boiling water.

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Heartworms

Transmitted via mosquitoes, heartworms spend their adult life in the heart and large blood vessels connecting the heart and lungs. Signs of heartworm disease include rapid breathing, coughing, decreased appetite, weight loss, and listlessness. Your veterinarian may test for an active infection before prescribing treatment. The best prevention program includes a heartworm preventive and reduced mosquito exposure.

Hookworms

These common intestinal parasites cause serious disease including severe diarrhea and anemia. Infection occurs via ingestion of the larvae from contaminated soil, water or feces; larval penetration of the skin; or larval infection of the fetus. Symptoms include pale gums, weakness, stunted growth, emaciation, and dull and dry coats. To prevent infections, clean litter boxes daily, prevent contact with infected animals, and de-worm annually. Hookworms can also infect humans.

Roundworms

The most common digestive tract parasite, adult roundworms live in the small intestine and absorb nutrients, interfere with digestion, and can damage the intestinal lining. Mild infestations often have no symptoms. But severe cases are often accompanied by thin, dull hair coats, a pot-belly appearance, anemia, vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation. Daily litter box cleaning and annual de-worming help prevent infection. Roundworms can also infect humans.

Tapeworms

These flat, segmented worms live in the small intestine and can grow up to 20 inches long. Symptoms include abdominal discomfort, nervousness, vomiting, and convulsions. Active segments around the anus may cause your cat to lick or "scoot" across the floor. Prevention relies on effective flea and lice control on both your cat and in her environment.

Feline Scabies (*Notoedric Mange*)

Female mites burrow into a cat's skin to lay eggs, which hatch, grow into adults, mate, and start the process over. Symptoms include hair loss; itching of the ears, face, eyelids, and neck; and thickened, wrinkled, crust-covered skin. To prevent, eliminate contact with stray or infected cats and only use boarders and grooming facilities with strict sanitation standards.

Coccidia

These one-celled parasites thrive in the intestinal tract. Most cats and kittens develop a natural immunity as they age. However, this immunity permits adult cats to carry coccidia and spread this contagious parasite in their feces. Immunosuppressed kittens and cats suffering with coccidia often have mild to severe diarrhea. In some cases, vomiting, loss of appetite, dehydration, and worse may occur. Prevent the spread of coccidia with strict sanitation and daily litter box cleaning.

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We Recommend		
 Drontal® Tablets for Cats Prescription medication used to remove tapeworms, hookworms and large roundworms in cats and kittens.	 Ear-Rite® Miticide for Cats Safely kills ear mites.	 Bayer Advantage® Environmental Treatments Controls fleas, ticks, and other pests in and around your home.
 Tradewinds Wormer Effectively kills tapeworms.	 Nature's Miracle® Self-Cleaning Litter Boxes Eases litter box sanitation to help prevent the spread of parasites.	 Heartgard for Cats Helps prevent heartworms.

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