3 Keys to Cat Flea Control

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Oftentimes, you are not aware your pet has a flea problem until the damage is done and your home is infested with them.

Fleas are a common cat concern and although most cat fleas do not actually live on humans, they can bite humans and cause skin irritation. Regular preventive treatment should ensure that your cat does not have fleas, but if you are dealing with a flea infestation, cleaning and spraying the environment with a flea control preparation will stop the problem immediately.

1. Why control fleas...

   While many cats live with fleas and show minimal signs of infestation, control is advisable because:

   - The cat flea carries the larval stage of the tapeworm *Dipylidium caninum*. Cats can be infested with these worms by eating fleas during grooming.
   - Fleas have the potential to transmit other infectious agents.
   - Adult fleas feed on cats' blood, and in young kittens, this can cause anemia. Anemic kittens are weak.
   - Some cats develop an allergy to flea saliva, which causes them to scratch excessively or to develop skin disease.
   - Cat fleas can cause itchy bites on sensitive humans.

2. Remove fleas in the environment

   Frequent vacuuming can help to reduce, but not eliminate, environmental infestation. Vacuum bags should be disposed of to prevent collected immature flea stages from continuing

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to develop in the house. Even though it is expensive and time-consuming, all soft furnishings should be treated. All nooks and crannies should be included, such as gaps between floorboards and moldings. Treatment of the whole house is essential. Anything that is heavily infested, such as pet bedding, should be treated with a flea control product, laundered, or thrown out.

3. Long term flea control

Once the adult fleas have been removed from all the animals in the house and the environment, prevention should be considered. Flea control products come in many forms: Collars, shampoos, sprays, foams, powders, and monthly topicals or oral liquids.

We firmly believe that prevention is the best guard against a flea problem. The monthly flea preventives we recommend that include Insect Growth Regulators (IGRs) or Insect Development Inhibitors (IDIs) are very safe because they act on receptors that are not present in mammals, only in insects. They have excellent safety profiles enabling the treatment of kittens from a young age. We recommend monthly topicals to our clients and have several effective choices for cats:

- **Doctors' Favorite!** Advantage kills adult fleas and flea larvae and is also a topical product. It contains the insecticide imidacloprid.

(watch video)

One oral preventive that we recommend is Program containing the IDI lufenuron, which halts development of flea eggs. The flea has to bite the cat in order to ingest the IDI and, therefore, would not be the preventive of choice for cats that have flea bite dermatitis.

Remember that if you have treated your cat with a spray or mist, do not use a topical preventive immediately afterward. Always follow manufacturer's guidelines, and never use products labeled for dogs on your cat.

Long term flea control is essential for a happy environment for your family, your cat, and any other animals in your house.

How to tell if your cat has fleas

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When cats groom themselves, they ingest any fleas on their haircoats, making them difficult to detect. The only signs you may see are incessant itching or flea bites on your own ankles! We recommend this procedure to determine whether your cat has fleas or not:

- Place your cat on a sheet of white paper
- Comb her with a fine toothed comb
- Look for "flea dirt" (which is flea feces) as well as the presence of fleas on the paper. Flea dirt is generally black and comma-shaped. When moistened and rubbed lightly, flea dirt will leave a telltale brownish-red stain.

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