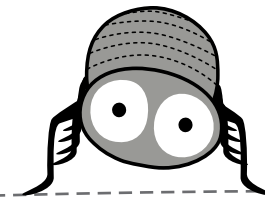


Cats and Fleas

Advice For Your Pet



Cats and Fleas



Article Features

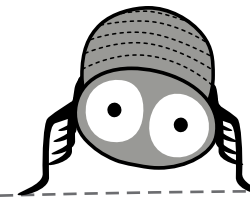
- What are fleas
- How to prevent fleas
- How to spot the symptoms
- How to respond to them

Everyone wants to make sure their pets are as healthy and happy as possible, and that means giving them regular check-overs for any infections, injuries or parasites that could be causing them harm.

This guide covers everything you need to know about cats and fleas: how to spot the symptoms, the best treatments to use and how to stop them coming back.



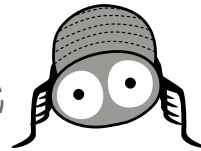
What Are Fleas?



The common cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felis*, is one of the most widespread and abundant species of flea in the world. Measuring about 1-2mm long, they are parasitic insects that infest the coats of cats, feeding on their blood and quickly reproducing and laying eggs on your pet's body. Although they're a separate species to the dog flea, cat fleas are actually the most common flea found on dogs too.

Fleas are wingless, but have long hind legs that allow them to jump relatively high and move very quickly. They also have extremely tough shells that prevent them from being squashed when your cat scratches at them.

A flea infestation can be very itchy and uncomfortable for your pet, and if left untreated can spread to other areas of your home. While they do not live on people, cat fleas can and will feed on adults and children if they're given the chance.

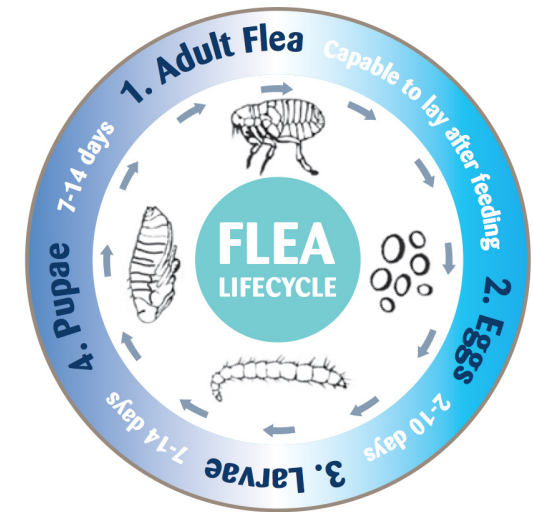


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Where They Come From

Fleas are often picked up by cats from wild animals like birds, rabbits and mice, usually while they are hunting - fleas can jump from one animal to another when their bodies come into close contact, and almost immediately begin laying eggs.

Flea eggs may also be contracted from bedding, soil, carpets or floorboards. The eggs are extremely durable and can lie dormant for months at a time.



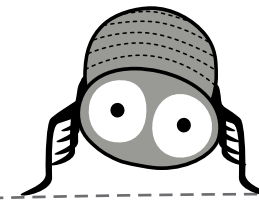
Their Life Cycle

Fleas begin as eggs, which are laid by females in batches of around 20 at a time, usually on the pet's body. After a period of two days to two weeks, worm-like larvae hatch from the eggs and feed on any organic material nearby. During the larval stage, fleas will seek out dark places to hide.

After one to two weeks, the larvae then weave a cocoon (just like butterflies) and spend around a week pupating before emerging as an adult. They will then try to find a blood meal and reproduce, after which the cycle begins again.



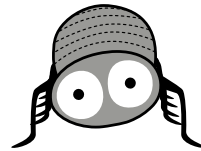
How to Prevent Fleas



As fleas can be very difficult to get rid of once they have settled in, it's best to take precautions against your cat getting them in the first place: preventative treatment is the best way to fight an infestation.

This can be done by regularly treating your pet for fleas; ask a vet, or one of Pets at Home's Flea Fighters, to recommend the most suitable treatment. They will weigh your cat, but to keep the stress to your pet at a minimum, a handy tip is to weigh yourself holding your cat, weigh yourself separately, then deduct the latter from the initial weigh-in to give your cat's weight. Products like Frontline, which comes in a "spot-on" solution, is a very effective preventative measure. Cats should be treated once every month.

Talking to a Flea & Worm Advisor from Pets at Home will help you in your quest to battle fleas!



Vacuum regularly!

You can also reduce the chance of fleas establishing themselves in your home by vacuuming regularly, which helps to catch eggs and larvae, and washing your pet's bedding above 60 degrees centigrade.

Stopping a repeat problem in your home

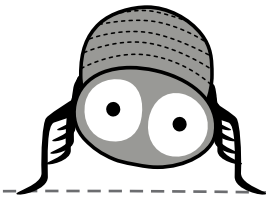
Removing the fleas from your cat's coat and bedding is only the start of the battle; flea eggs can lie dormant for months and it's common for infestations to come

back long after you've forgotten about them. Regular vacuuming will help to get rid of the eggs, but to make sure you've got them all it is best to use a household flea treatment, such as foggers or sprays.

Before applying these treatments, make sure all pet food and water dishes, toys and clothing have been removed from the area to be treated. People and pets should also leave the area for as long as the manufacturer's instructions state - usually a few hours.

It's important to apply household treatments thoroughly and to all areas that might be housing eggs or larvae - these include carpets, throw rugs and any nooks and dark spaces behind furniture. As an extra precaution, you may want to replace your pet's bedding. Keep vacuuming thoroughly every day after this treatment to catch any survivors.

How to Spot the Symptoms



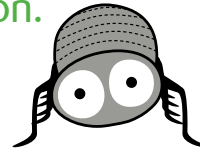
It can be difficult to tell when a cat has fleas, but even mild infestations can be detected by checking their fur and bedding on a regular basis.



Warning signs your cat has fleas

Constant scratching is the most obvious indicator of fleas in cats, but this in itself doesn't necessarily mean the problem is flea-based - and some cats carry fleas without scratching.

You may also notice a change in behaviour, including jumpiness and agitation.



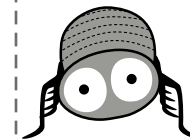
Hair loss caused by excessive grooming, and small, pepper-like specks (flea dirt) in your cat's fur are all warning signs of a flea infestation. You may also notice a change in behaviour, including jumpiness and agitation, as well as red spots in its bedding where flea dirt has fallen off.

Tests you can run to check for fleas

The best way to confirm a flea infestation is to run a comb through its fur (special fine-toothed flea combs are best), then hold it over a white surface like a piece



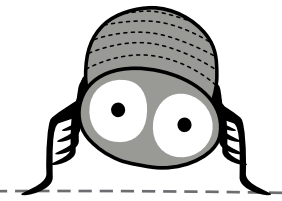
of kitchen roll. This will let you easily spot any fleas or flea dirt that's deposited from the comb. Flea dirt is essentially dried blood - if you add a few drops of water to the paper and the dirt turns reddish-brown, it's very likely your pet has fleas.



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Inspecting the skin under your cat's fur may also reveal reddish bumps that can be a sign of flea bites, especially if your pet is allergic. Check its bedding for eggs - they are usually deposited in warm, humid places.

How You Can Treat Your Pet



Fortunately, you are not on your own in the war against fleas. There is a large selection of flea treatments available, both veterinary-strength treatments in pet shops and on prescription from your vet. It's vital to run regular treatments for fleas and be vigilant against them returning. Always consult a vet or a Flea Fighter at Pets at Home for the best advice on treatments.

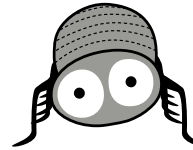


Over-the-counter treatments

When buying flea treatments in-store, it's vital to get products specifically designed for cats: flea control for dogs can be too strong for cats and carries a risk of overdose. If in doubt or if you are treating young kittens, follow a vet's advice

Prescription treatments should only be used when directed by a vet.

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Prescription treatments

Many prescription treatments are applied as "spot on" treatments that come in a pipette. They are usually more effective than over-the-counter remedies and usually kill all parasites within 24 hours and provide ongoing protection for at least a month afterward. However, and as with all medications, they should only be used when directed by a vet and the stated doses should always be followed.

