



Parasite Prevention Part 2 – Fleas and Ticks

As we continue to discuss parasites that affect our pets, we will move on to the blood suckers that we know as fleas and ticks. Both are ectoparasites, meaning that they are found on the outside of our pets.

Fleas

- While adult fleas have a short **life span**, the eggs and larval stages can be fairly long-lived and can 'hibernate' until conditions are right for hatching.
 - For this reason it makes breaking the lifecycle of the flea hard and they can be very difficult to get rid of in the home.
 - To see the life cycle of a flea click here:
<http://www.cdc.gov/dpdx/fleas/>
 - One adult female can lay around 2000 eggs in one month!
- The **dangers** of letting fleas take control:
 - Spread disease and parasites
 - Haemobartonellosis: targets red blood cells and can lead to anemia
 - Tapeworms: one type of tapeworm uses fleas as an intermediate host before infecting dogs and cats
 - Plague: while rare, *Yersinia pestis*, the bacteria that cause it, is still out there
 - Allergy dermatitis
 - Intense scratching, skin redness, pain, and irritation = unhappy pet
 - Anemia
 - Fleas can spread diseases that cause anemia, but if the load of fleas is high enough they can lose enough blood to cause anemia as well.
- How do you **confirm** if your pet has fleas?
 - Do you see extremely small insects crawling/jumping around on your pet?
 - They are usually easily seen on the belly
 - Take a comb, run it through your pet's coat a few times, deposit whatever you catch on to a white surface, get it damp, and rub your finger across the surface.
 - If it smears out and turns red, your pet has flea dirt
 - Flea dirt = flea poop – it smears red because they eat blood.





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- How to **get rid of the pesky things**
 - Dr. Andy Roark's advice: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NHQ_dJLZk
 - **Wash** your pet – dawn dish soap is a great option, but special flea shampoos are available
 - Be careful with flea shampoos – they can irritate the eyes and dry out their skin
 - Wash/vacuum all upholstery (rugs, bedding, couch, etc); or throw them out and buy new
 - Vacuum your carpet every few days – throw away the vacuum bag/contents each time otherwise the larva can still hatch and jump around the house.
 - You may want to **treat** the house and yard with special flea killing products too.
 - Cedar based repellants are great options for the backyard!
 - It can take at least 3 months to break the cycle and to get rid of them – don't give up
- **Prevention**: see the list at the end of the article for great monthly preventatives.
- Video about fleas: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gsr_NDBRc9U

Ticks

- The **life cycle** of a tick involves 4 stages of feeding to go from to larva to adult.
 - To see a more detailed look at how they become the creepy crawlies that we know click here: <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=2+2111&aid=603>
- Besides being creepy, why are ticks so bad?
 - They spread lots of blood-borne **diseases** to pets and people
 - Ehrlichiosis
 - Anaplasmosis
 - Lyme's Disease
 - Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever
 - Tick Paralysis
 - And many more.....
 - Many of these diseases cause lethargy, lack of appetite, vomiting, fever, joint pain, weakness, and paralysis (<http://www.akcchf.org/canine-health/your-dogs-health/caring-for-your-dog/canine-tick-borne-disease.html>)
- **Diagnosing** Tick borne diseases
 - Most veterinarians can test for some tick borne diseases using the same test that tests for Heartworm disease (which again should be done annually)
 - This test requires a small amount of blood and tests for the 2-4 most prevalent tick borne diseases.
 - Treating a tick borne disease typically requires a long antibiotic treatment
- Ticks can typically be found on the face, neck, legs, and in the ears of our pets.





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- To **remove a tick** make sure you firmly grasp as close to the head as possible and pull out.
 - Try to avoid squeezing the body, especially if its engorged
 - Make sure to remove the head from inside the skin
 - Check out these **tick myths** debunked before trying other removal methods:
<http://www.tickedoff.com/myths.html>



Preventing Fleas and Ticks!!!

- You can prevent these nasty insects from using your pets as a meal by using monthly preventives and insect repellants.
 - A list of products can be found here:
 - <http://www.1800petmeds.com/Flea+++Tick+Prevention-cat50.html>
 - <http://www.drsfostersmith.com/pic/article.cfm?aid=325>
 - Make sure to talk to your veterinarian about what product they would recommend for your pet. *Considerations* to think about when picking a product include:
 - Sensitive skin issues – might want to avoid topicals
 - Sensitive stomach – might want to avoid chewables
 - Different products are effective against certain ticks – pick one to protect your pet against the ticks that are most prevalent in your area
 - Some products only work on certain life stages of the flea – research 1st