

FLEAS AND YOUR PET: HOW TO BITE BACK

Anyone who has ever been bitten by a flea can understand the misery of a dog or cat infested by these tenacious skin parasites. Not only can fleas cause intense itching at the site of a bite, but they can also cause allergic reactions and skin infections in certain pets. Additionally, fleas rob animals of their red blood cells over time; this can result in a dangerous anemia, especially in immature and senior pets, who are slower to produce new red blood cells to replace those lost. Fleas are also responsible for transmitting the most common tapeworm found in dogs and cats.

The most common misconception regarding fleas is that they disappear during the cold winter months. Unfortunately, fleas survive perfectly well in the controlled temperature of your house, hitching rides on your pets (and you!) for the blood meal they require in order to reproduce. It is also important to remember that the fleas seen on your dog or cat represent only the "tip of the iceberg." If your pet has fleas, then your home's carpet, sofa cushions, etc. are also infested with the far more numerous eggs and larvae of the next generation of fleas. This is the reason that the flea collars, shampoos, powders and dips used to control these pests are largely ineffective: while they may kill some or all of the adult fleas when applied, they do little or nothing to control the immature stages that will soon grow up and come looking for your pet. . Fortunately, veterinary research has produced some wonderfully safe and effective flea medications that are able to provide continuous, long-acting protection. Using these products, you can be assured that today's fleas and their nasty little offspring hiding in your house will be neutralized!

Flea Medications

The newest flea preventatives are divided into two classes based on their actions. The first group includes Revolution, Advantage and Frontline, which are formulated to kill adult fleas on your pet. All products are applied to the skin between the shoulders and are absorbed into the oil glands and distributed over the skin of the entire animal. When an adult flea lands on your pet, it receives a lethal dose of the medication and soon dies. This protection lasts for thirty days (Revolution and Advantage) or up to ninety days (Frontline). (Frontline and Revolution are effective in killing ticks for thirty days post-application).

Advantage and Frontline are safe insecticides because they are not absorbed into your pet's bloodstream, and are effective even after bathing and swimming. Revolution is initially absorbed into the bloodstream in order to clear the pet's system of other parasites but remains only in the skin for the remainder of the month. It also has been proven very safe for our pets. These are the medications of choice for those pets with flea allergies and for those animals with current infestations or frequent exposures to new populations of fleas.

Program (also called **Sentinel** when combined with heartworm preventative) is an oral medication for your pet, which will be ingested by an adult female flea when it bites your

pet. This medication works by sterilizing the eggs laid by that female so that they cannot develop into adult fleas. Because the flea life cycle is only three weeks long, the adult fleas die off and are not replaced by the next generation--resulting in a flea-free pet and household. This product is a good choice for animals with no or few current fleas, no flea allergies, and no routine exposure to fleas (ie, other untreated animals, barns, etc.) The obvious disadvantage is the slow onset of action--adult fleas will continue to feed on your pet until the end of their natural lifespan. Advantage or Frontline can be used safely in conjunction with Program.

The principles of flea control are the same for all of the above products:

- Treat all cats and dogs in the household.
- Prevention is the best medicine: begin using a flea preventative before the problem occurs.
- In bad infestations, it may be necessary to use an environmental spray in conjunction with one of the products above in order to rapidly reduce the number of adult fleas, larvae, and eggs.

The veterinarians and staff at Wellington Veterinary Clinic will be happy to answer any questions and make product recommendations for your pet!