

No More Fleas

A Collection of Articles

Fight Fleas The Natural Way And Give Your Dog's Health A Boost!

There's nothing like a flea to ruin a dog's good time!

If fleas are making your dog miserable, then there's only one thing you can do: find the flea's number one enemy. And no, it's not a flea collar. It's not flea powder either.

Let me explain....

Evolution has given fleas quite a few advantages This is what makes them so tough to get rid of. You see, the flea is a very adaptable and resilient little pest (not unlike the cockroach--ugh).

What advantages do fleas have? There are three major ones:

- First of all, small as they may be, **fleas have an immune system**. And they *will* develop immunity to any kind of pesticide you use on them. It may take a few generations before this happens, but it doesn't take all that long for fleas to reproduce, so a few generations is nothing in "flea time".
- Second, fleas go through several stages of development, referred to as a "life cycle". During the fleas life cycle, it progresses from egg to larva to pupa, to adult flea. Trouble is, **only the adult and larval fleas are susceptible to attack**. Flea eggs and cocoons can live quite comfortably through a "bug bomb", or in the presence of flea collars and powders.
- Third, **fleas don't live just on your dog**. It would be great if they did, because we'd only have to deal with our pet and we'd be done. We all understand that dogs pick up fleas outdoors, and that every time they step outside, dogs are tasty targets for fleas inhabiting the yard, woods, etc. So, we know there's danger lurking outside. But you might figure that once a flea hops on board, it'll live out its life cycle on your pet. To some extent, that's true.

Initially, fleas lay their eggs on their host. But, most of the eggs don't stay there. They fall off, landing on the floor, in the carpet, and back in the yard! And we're not talking about just a few eggs. A single flea can lay 10 to 50 eggs a day, and can live as long as 100 days. That's as many as 2000 eggs in the lifetime of a single flea. Imagine the possibilities...

Here's another disturbing (and pretty disgusting) fact about fleas: **when they bite, they inject a tiny amount of saliva into your dog.** It acts as a blood thinner, making the blood easier to extract, but this also can be a means of spreading diseases and tapeworms. And it certainly isn't good for allergy-prone dogs, who can develop rashes and hot spots.

=====**The Trouble with Traditional Methods**=====

Convention has it that dogs should wear **flea collars**. If that doesn't work, sprinkle her with flea powder. And, of course, fumigate the house and yard. We've already discussed one problem with that approach, which is that fleas become immune to all pesticides sooner or later, so you must continually change products. But the other problem is more serious. It's the fact that all pesticides are poisons. They **weaken your dog's immune system**, making him an even tastier target for fleas. And they **can make him sick in other ways** too.

Poison is poison, no matter how you package it. (Yes the "spot-on" products are full of toxins too) And in your fight to eradicate fleas, you'll end up spreading poisons all over your yard, around your home, and --through his skin--into your dog's vital organs. Sure, no more fleas, but at what cost to everyone's health?

=====**So, what's a dog lover to do?**=====

Fortunately, there's an answer. What most of us aren't told is that **there are natural substances that fleas can't tolerate**, and that are actually lethal to fleas. One of these is call "diatomaceous earth", or "DE".

DE is composed of finely milled fossilized shells of minuscule organisms called diatoms. The microscopically fine, sharp edges dry out the insects' outer shell on contact and fleas will dehydrate and die within hours.

The insects also die when they eat the dust. And it works on lots of other pests besides fleas! What's great about DE is that your dog (or cat) can eat it and it won't hurt her at all. And since it works by dehydration, fleas can't become immune to it

DE can be purchased as a powder and sprinkled on your pet and around your home. Don't leave out that most important step! Sprinkle the floors, furniture and carpeting. Sprinkle your dog's bedding and any place he likes to "hang out", since that's where the most fleas will accumulate. Be sure to get underneath the furniture, because fleas like to hide out in dark places.

While vacuuming and washing the floors often is helpful, unless you can do it daily, it won't be enough. You should also know that fleas that get sucked into the vacuum bag can live and reproduce there, so be sure to vacuum up some DE powder too, to kill off fleas in the bag.

=====**What about my dog's irritated skin?**=====

All that scratching and those powders can leave a dog's skin pretty irritated. Well, Mother Nature has something for that too...

Neem seed oil is a very bitter oil with a garlic/sulfur smell and contains vitamin E and other essential amino acids. It's completely natural, and has been used as a botanical pesticide for years. When used on fleas and other pests, it impairs their development. Added bonuses are an antibacterial property, and a **soothing effect on the skin.**(Humans have been know to use Neem oil as an anti-arthritis and anti-wrinkle formula!)

Comb the oil through your dog's coat with a flea comb to help distribute it to both coat and skin. Now, your dog is not only free of fleas, but her skin feels better too.

Essential oils are another natural and effective way of repelling fleas. Cedar, tea tree, citronella, eucalyptus and pennyroyal, (the last two are toxic to cats) are all repulsive to fleas and can be obtained at most stores that sell herbal remedies. There are also essential oil blends containing Neem oil. Just dab a drop of the essential oil on your dog's collar, and mist it -- diluted with water-- onto her coat. Or, buy a pre-formulated spray and mist her to drive fleas away.

If your pet is already suffering from flea bites and itchy skin, herbal sprays will help soothe irritated skin. They contain aloe, which we all know is great for burns and hot spots!

b>Bathing your dog is also an effective, safe and natural way to get rid of fleas, using a neem or oatmeal based shampoo if her skin is irritated. "Bathe" her bedding too, by washing it weekly in hot soapy water. A flea comb will help you find their hiding spots.

=====**What about the yard?**=====

You can sprinkle DE powder here too, or apply it with a sprayer. Another option is to use "**beneficial ematodes**". Nematodes are microscopic soil worms that attack white grubs, fleas and crickets. They can be purchased from nurseries and similar outlets, mixed with water and sprayed on the breeding areas.

In order for the nematodes to survive, the soil must remain relatively moist and watered at least twice weekly. Beneficial nematodes do not harm plants, animals, humans or birds. Concentrate your spraying within 50 feet of where your dog "hangs out", since that's where the most fleas are found.

=====**Ready to go high tech?**=====

So far we've been taking the all-natural approach. But these days, there's a gadget for everything, and killing fleas is no exception. An "Electronic Flea Zapper Comb" which relies on a safe, low electric charge that is harmless to you and your pet, is reportedly "instantly deadly to fleas.

Does it work? I can't honestly tell you, but I love the idea! One of these days I'll get around to trying one!

As for the rest, these are time-honored methods for combating fleas and I can vouch for their effectiveness. Don't forget that any method you choose will work best if you start using it about a month before flea season begins. And use it continuously once you've spotted fleas on your pet. That way, you'll be sure you catch all fleas that survived as eggs and pupae, by being ready for them as they enter the vulnerable stages of their life cycle -- larval and adult fleas.

=====Yippee!! No more fleas!!=====

I know all of this may seem like a lot of work, but in the end, it's well worth it. Your dog will have no fleas, and will suffer no harmful side effects from collars and traditional powders. What's more worthwhile than having a happy, healthy dog who's thrilled to be alive?

© 2004, Carolyn Schweitzer. Lifelong dog-lover, power-shopper, and former family dentist Carolyn Schweitzer is owner and editor of Great-Dog-Gift.com where she offers a wide range of choices for dog gift shoppers, plus shopping and gift-giving tips. (Also advice on dog care and feeding.)

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Dog Flea Control

There are numerous products that will kill adult fleas on your dog. However, they vary in the duration of their effects.

1. Flea shampoos, sprays, and powders. Most products will kill any fleas present on your dog at the time of application, but many have no lasting effect - your dog may have more fleas within 24 hours of being treated. When using a flea shampoo, always begin on the dog's head, face, and ears so the fleas won't run for shelter in those hard to reach areas. Be extra careful not to drip any solution in your pet's eyes. Applying the solution with a sponge is helpful. All shampoos should be rinsed thoroughly from the coat.

Some of the newer, more effective sprays can be a valuable part of the overall treatment plan. They kill adult fleas rapidly and are safe enough to use daily, if necessary. Flea sprays containing insect growth regulators (IGR's) are helpful in managing the overall problem because they help to break the flea life cycle. Be sure to read the label when using any of these products, because they might be recommended for once a week application, instead of daily.

Flea powders are easy to use - simply sprinkle on your dog's coat.

2. Flea rinses or dips. These may be effective for four to five days, depending on the product. The rinse is applied after the dog has been shampooed and not rinsed out and left to dry on the dog's coat. You need to dip the entire dog from nose to tail. Follow directions carefully regarding frequency throughout the flea season.

Pet shops and supermarkets sell a huge variety of flea dips and shampoos for your pet. If your dog has only a few fleas, there's no reason why you can't treat him yourself. Make sure to follow the label instructions on whatever product you buy, and pay close attention to age restrictions. Many products are not suitable for young puppies. Never use cat products on dogs.

As with flea shampoos, when using a flea dip, always begin on the dog's head, face, and ears so the fleas won't run for shelter in those hard to reach areas. Be extra careful not to drip any solution in your pet's eyes. Applying the solution with a sponge is helpful.

You might want to take your dog to the veterinarian where either an assistant or a groomer on staff will dip your pet, or take your dog to a grooming shop for flea treatment.

3. Sprays containing flea growth regulators which are called IGR's. These sprays are usually applied weekly and the growth regulators help break the flea's life cycle.

4. Flea collars. Flea collars are an easy, economical, and useful method of flea control when used before you see fleas, but aren't very effective if you already have a flea problem. Flea collars are on the dog and working 24 hours per day. However, they are not very

effective in climates that are especially conducive to flea reproduction. Many people don't like the smell of insecticidal flea collars or the smell and oily feeling the insecticide leaves on their hands after petting a dog wearing one. But, they are a lot better than nothing!

Many flea collars, such as the Ovitrol Plus or Ovitrol Plus II sold by veterinarians, kill adult fleas and also make flea eggs sterile. These are generally called Egg-Stopper Collars and contain insect growth regulating ingredients, which prevents egg from hatching.

Some dogs are sensitive to flea collars and develop a skin irritation under the collar, so if this happens, you should remove the collar and use another method of flea control.

In addition, there are High Tech Electronic Flea Collars for dogs that emit powerful ultrasonic pulses. They are supposed to be inaudible and harmless to pets and humans but, fleas go crazy!

Do-it-yourself Low Tech Herbal flea collar - effects last approximately one month: Buy a soft untreated flea collar. Mix 1/2 teaspoon rubbing alcohol, essential oils of 1 drop cedar wood oil, 1 drop lavender, 1 drop citronella, 1 drop thyme oil. Open the contents of four garlic capsules into mixture. Soak flea collar until it has absorbed sufficient mixture soaked through, then let dry.

5. Spot-on products. Advantage® and Frontline® are two brand name products that are applied topically to a small area of the dog's skin and they effectively kill fleas for at least a month. They are purchased in small vials that contain one dose for various sizes of dogs. They kill adult fleas, usually before the flea has the opportunity to bite your dog.

When using some of the new residual topical treatments such as the spray and the liquid applied to the dog's neck, you may find environmental control will become much less a concern. In some cases, treating the dog with these new products will effectively control the environmental problem.

6. The pill. (Program™) This product prevents flea eggs from hatching when administered orally to pets once a month at mealtime. Dogs are fed Program in tablet form. Different tablet sizes and suspension doses are prescribed according to the animal's weight. When an adult female flea bites a Program-treated dog, the flea ingests the active ingredient (lufenuron) which then passes into her eggs and prevents them from hatching. Program is dispensed only through veterinarians. This drug does not kill the adult fleas on your dog, but it does break the flea life cycle by preventing hatching of the next generation of flea eggs. In effect, it kills the next generation of fleas.

A similar product called Sentinel contains both the flea control ingredient and heartworm medication all in one dosage.

7. Natural methods include essential herbal oils, essential fatty acids, garlic, and/or B vitamins tend to make the animal less tasty to fleas. You can supplement with garlic or brewers yeast tablets. Some animals are allergic to brewers yeast, so watch closely the first week or so to make sure the itching doesn't get worse.

8. Flea Combs. Run the comb through your pet's hair and gather a bit of hair and "flea dirt". Daily flea combing may seem like a tedious process, but you can trap some of them in the comb. Be sure to drown them in soapy water, because fleas can jump out of plain water.

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friends.

Introducing the Flea!

In cats and dogs, fleas are perhaps the most common external parasite problem encountered by pet owners. They have been around for a very long time and know a thing or two about species survival so getting rid of a flea problem is never easy. Keep the following in mind when tackling fleas on your cat or dog.

They are an environmental problem, not a pet problem. Yes, you will see the fleas on your pet, but those you see are a very small proportion of the total flea population in your pet's environment (approx 1% visible to you vs 99% hidden in the environment!). The implication of this is that you cannot hope to beat a flea problem by only treating the pet - you have to include the environment in your plans.

Fleas need blood meals to survive and breed. They are also photophobic (don't like bright sunlight). So that patch of sand in the middle of your garden 20m from the dog's kennel is unlikely to be the source of your flea problem. Fleas like warm, humid areas out of direct sunlight.

Dogs and cats are the preferred host for the normal pet flea (*C.felis*). If you have pets but find fleas jumping onto you for a blood meal then you have a huge infestation on your hands. The exception to this observation is if you move into somewhere that has not been occupied for a while then newly hatched fleas will jump on anything to get a blood meal.

One should not stop the "anti-flea" drive over winter. As it gets cooler, the flea lifecycle takes longer to complete and the presence of fleas may be less obvious. However, the lifecycle rarely stops altogether, even in very cold climates because then the pets are often inside the house with central heating. Hmm, lets see... warm, constant humidity, out of direct sunlight - yes, ideal conditions for flea survival.

You might not actually see any real live fleas on your pet (this is particularly true of cats because they groom so frequently). But your pet may still have a flea problem. If your dog or cat is scratching a lot and has some hair loss, especially just above the tail on the lower back, then look for little black and/or white grains in the coat. These are flea faeces (black) and flea eggs (white) and their presence means that there are fleas on your pet - even if you can't see any! It doesn't automatically follow however that getting rid of the fleas will sort out the hair loss problem. Alas, it is often more complicated than that but reducing the flea load will always be beneficial to a scratching pet.

Fleas, signs of fleas, or a skin reaction to fleas may be present on a single e.g. dog in your household, while your other dogs look fine. You cannot only treat the affected animal to get rid of the fleas. You must treat all the dogs (and cats) in the household AND the environment or you are going to lose the battle.

Very young animals can literally be sucked (almost) dry of blood if they have a very heavy flea burden. This can obviously be life threatening on its own, and is often made worse by a concurrent worm infestation.

What do you use to treat for fleas? By now I hope you realise there is more to this than simply buying a flea collar! There are a wide range of products available for treating both pets and the environment. Remember though that the formulations for dogs are usually different to those for cats - either in terms of the active ingredient or the dosage. Make sure you consult your Veterinarian to establish what is safe for your pet - cats can be particularly susceptible to some of the chemicals used to control fleas.

Whatever you use to treat the environment, it is best to start with a thorough mechanical cleaning before you apply any sort of chemical. Vacuuming, using only a nozzle to ensure good suction into carpet pile and cracks between floor boards, will remove a significant number of the non mobile flea eggs and pupae present in the environment. Outside, remove moist and rotting vegetation, cut the grass short and try to expose damp, shady areas to as much sunlight as possible.

Natural flea repellants are available but, as with the other anti-flea formulations, don't expect them to work miracles all by themselves. fleas have been around a long time - several million years in fact - so they know how to survive as a species. Your best efforts will be needed to keep them under control!

Keith Perrett is a qualified Veterinarian

<http://www.pet-health-for-humans.com/pet-health-questions.html>

Fleas are the most common external parasite of pets in North America. Fleas are small wingless insects that use their specialized mouth to pierce the skin and siphon blood from their host. When a flea bites, it injects a small amount of saliva into the skin to prevent the blood from coagulating. Some animals become sensitized to flea saliva and animals that are allergic can have severe itching and scratching from a single bite. Flea allergy dermatitis is the most common disease among dogs.

Current flea control products are primarily either oral or topical systemic treatments. Most of the products may be used for prevention as well as to treat existing flea problems. One group of products control fleas by interrupting their development by killing or stopping the maturation of flea larvae and eggs. These drugs are called Insect Growth Regulators (IGRs). One common oral product used is lufenuron which is found in the Program® line of products which are administered orally in tablet or liquid form. Methoprene and pyriproxifen are also IGRs that are available as sprays or collars. The FDA shares regulation of these products with the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Because even the same products from other countries have not been approved by these agencies, it is illegal to purchase or import these products for use in the United States.

Currently the most popular flea control products kill adult fleas (adulticide), are applied topically and work rapidly. Popular topical products utilize fipronil which is the key ingredient in Frontline® Top Spot and imidacloprid which is in Advantage®. The most popular product on the market, Frontline Plus®, utilizes both an adulticide and an IGR. An oral adulticide that is also available is nitenpyram which is in Capstar® and begins to kill fleas in 30 minutes. Frontline Plus also kills ticks which makes it the most popular product where ongoing tick protection is required.

Consult with your veterinarian to determine which flea and tick control products are best for you. The choice of flea control will depend on your climate, environment, your pet's activities, and potential for exposure. However, with consistent use, it is almost always possible to control your flea problem. Using these products throughout the year typically will eliminate the need for regular insecticidal use. The following provide additional summary information on selected popular products.

Program from Novartis®

Program is available as a once a month pill or oral liquid suspension to be given with a full meal. Adult fleas that ingest Program's key ingredient, lufenuron, produce sterile eggs. Program does not kill adult fleas so pets remain susceptible to fleas hatching and maturing pupa already present in the environment. Therefore, some time may pass before the all fleas are killed in an environment. In order to stop the life cycle, every animal in

the environment must receive lufenuron. Pets should also be sprayed with an adulticide during the first week or two of starting Program.

Advantage from Bayer®

Advantage is applied topically on both dogs and cats and seems to be very well-tolerated by sensitive cats. Advantage kills fleas within 24 hours and 100% protection can be maintained for cats for 21 days and 90% protection can be maintained for dogs for 28 days. Advantage is susceptible to washing off so dogs that are active outdoors and dogs that swim or must be bathed frequently should be re-treated frequently. Up to weekly re-treatment is allowed. The imidacloprid in Advantage does not effect ticks, but K-9 Advantix, with permethrin does. K9 Advantix is only labeled for once a month K9 Advantix is ONLY FOR USE WITH DOGS and MUST NOT BE ADMINISTERED TO CATS.

Frontline Spray, Frontline Plus And Frontline Top Spot from Merial®

Frontline Spray, Frontline Plus, and Frontline Top Spot comprise the market leading Frontline flea control product line. The fipronil in Frontline products is a broad spectrum insecticide available as a spray or topical. Fipronil works by binding chemically to the pet's hair and is absorbed through the follicle by the sebaceous glands. As a spray, fipronil kills fleas at 95% for over 80 days after application on dogs and for 1 month with biweekly bathing. Frontline is labeled for puppies and kittens as young as 8 weeks (10 weeks for Top Spot) and it is not washed off by bathing. Frontline is also affective against ticks. Some cats may show minor adverse reactions with high volume use of the alcohol based spray product which should be applied no more than once a month. Frontline Plus also contains the IGR, S-methoprene which inhibits the growth of immature fleas.

Capstar from Novartis®

Capstar is an oral tablet for dogs and cats that may be administered as young as 4 weeks of age. It offers extremely rapid and complete killing of adult fleas and is safe enough that the tablets may be used whenever fleas are seen on your pet as often as once per day. Capstar may be used in combination with an IGR to kill fleas immediately to compliment the long-term control of an IGR such as Program.

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Flea Control Strategies

Did you know...

- Fleas spend only 10% of their time on your animal
- An average fleas' life span can be up to 2-3 years
- One female flea can lay up to 1 million eggs during its life
- Eggs can live unhatched in your carpet for a year until the right environment for hatching occurs
- Bark dust, wood piles and ivy are great places for fleas to survive the winter months
- The flea is the second oldest insect (the cockroach is the first) because of its excellent survival mechanisms

The Flea Life Cycle

Adult cat and dog fleas prefer to feed on pets rather than people. The pets are closer to the ground and have warmer body temperatures than humans. Second choice would be children -- especially infants and toddlers. Female fleas will probe and bite and average of seven times in a "grouping" before locating a blood vessel in the skin. The saliva they leave with each bite can cause a localized allergic reaction (flea allergy dermatitis or FAD as we call it in the veterinary world.) After feeding on large amounts of blood, the female flea deposits her eggs and droppings (flea dirt) which consists mostly of undigested blood. Both the eggs (which are white and about the size of a grain of salt) and the droppings (which are black and appear like ground pepper, often in the shape of a comma) drop off the animal's coat and spread all over the environment.

Here's a quick home-test to see if your pet has fleas: Lay out a white piece of butcher paper and groom your pet for a few minutes as they stand on the paper. Do you see any black, comma-looking things against the white paper? If so, put a drop of water on it. If it's flea dirt, the water will turn pink.

Flea eggs remain in the environment for variable amounts of time and are not destroyed by extremes in temperature or by pesticides. When proper conditions exist, the eggs hatch and release tiny white larvae. These larvae are not able to get around and must rely on the undigested blood left in the droppings for their food source. **Larvae** are very susceptible to extremes in environment, pesticides, and insect growth regulators.

Within several days the larvae spin a protective cocoon called a pupae around themselves. The pupae are very resistant to all but steam cleaning and can lie dormant for many months to years. The pupae is the primary stage that over-winters in the environment. When conditions are favorable (warm and moist), the pupae release **young adult fleas** and the cycle is complete.

The length of the flea life cycle can vary from a little as one month to as long as two or three years.

Flea Control Products

There are many products available to eliminate fleas. They differ in effectiveness, application, safety, convenience, odor of the product, and duration of effectiveness. Sounds pretty complicated, right? It is. It's actually a chemical nightmare.

AN EFFECTIVE FLEA CONTROL PROGRAM MUST INCLUDE ALL ANIMALS IN THE HOUSEHOLD AND THE ENTIRE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE ANIMALS LIVE (INCLUDING YOUR CAR.)

Many people only use one product at a time, which is NOT effective. You must treat the animal, the house, and the yard all at one time to get this challenge under control.

Control of fleas on the pet: You have your choice of powders, sprays, dips, spot-ons or oral growth regulators.

Flea Powder: Manufacturers of these products say flea powder is safe to use every 3-4 days on dogs and cats older than 8 weeks of age. The active ingredient, (pyrethrins being the safest and most natural ingredient) takes about 15 minutes to kill fleas when first applied. By the end of 5-7 days, if not reapplied, flea powder works only as a residual, taking up to 12 hours to kill the flea. There is no growth regulator in this product so it only kills the adults.

Note: Powder should be diluted to half strength with talcum powder when used on puppies and kittens.

Disadvantages of flea powder: Flea powder can make the coat feel rough and dirty. So, if your pet is already uncomfortable from the fleas and now you are alienating them by not giving them the affection you used to when their coats were cleaner and softer, this makes the problem worse. The animals do not enjoy flea powder and it may make asthma worse.

Flea Sprays: Sprays can vary somewhat. Most are alcohol-based and some are more organic than others. The alcohol is for quick kill of the adult and pre-adult stages. Some flea sprays contain an insect **growth regulator** that will kill flea eggs as well. Make sure you get one with this in it. Pets run when they see you come to them with that bottle after a few applications.

The only time I use flea spray is when I'm treating a cat for ear mites (I spray some on a Kleenex and wipe their head down after I clean their ears and put medication down both ear canals.) I also use it to spray my pant legs when I take walks in the woods during tick season.

So, could you use rubbing alcohol or vodka to kill the adults? Yes, but using rubbing alcohol can be toxic. Rubbing alcohol contains a bit of methanol, which can cause blindness when ingested. Cats groom themselves and will ingest this. If you want to use alcohol, stick with vodka or Everclear, but it's really not very effective.

Aromatherapy: Herbal insecticides include pennyroyal (very toxic), clove, citronella, and eucalyptus oils (diluted of course.) These can be mixed in with shampoos or applied to a material flea collar. They can be very irritating when applied directly to the skin. They should not be put directly onto the coat either because when the animal grooms himself or herself they will ingest it. In general, pets hate this type of flea control and only submit to it in a learned helplessness type of situation.

Flea collars are only minimally effective in the control of fleas. Most collars contain dichlorvos, which is released as a vapor. They are sold under several trade names. Dichlorvos is toxic to animals and people and can cause severe reactions occasionally. Remember, flea and tick collars don't work well for animals over 20 pounds.

Note: Collars are especially harmful to **Persian cats**. They may also cause localized reactions around the neck.

Ultrasonic collars are ineffective and may cause hearing loss in your pet. Ultrasonic collars are an expensive gimmick. Don't fall for this.

Dips which kill fleas and mites for several days or weeks are highly toxic and should not be used for routine flea control. One study found that more than 3 dips per year led to an increased incidence of cancer. Wear gloves if you decide on this method of flea control (although I have no idea why you would.) Try to pick a non-organophosphate (OGP) type with a growth inhibitor in it.

Pour-on and Spot-on products containing **organophosphates** are also very toxic. Organophosphate spot-on kills the fleas only after it bites the pet and sucks its blood. These products are also dangerous where infants are concerned. Do not let a small child be exposed to the pet for at least 24 hours after these products are used. I have heard of instances where the parent found a dead infant the day after putting this on the family dog that slept with the child. They are applied once every two weeks. A good rule of thumb is "if a little is good, a lot is NOT necessarily better." Use only the dose specified on the bottle. Make sure you know the weight of the animal before you dose them. Make note of the next paragraph.

Common side effects to flea products may include hypersalivation, vomiting, and diarrhea. Some animals appear to foam at the mouth, others stagger about. Their pupils dilate and they seem disoriented. The best treatment is to remove the product from the animal's skin or body. Bathe your pet immediately—with a mild shampoo NOT containing flea control. Some animals may need to be treated by a veterinarian with atropine or steroids to help the animal deal with the toxicity and in some instances to save their lives. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to call your vet.

One product on the market seems to be working quite well and is minimally toxic. It is called **Advantage**. Advantage is a spot-on with a growth inhibitor, which works for 3-4 weeks. It permeates the fatty layer of the skin. It should be applied after the bath because bathing leeches the product from the skin. Advantix is a formula that is used for those who are in a tick area. It is also fairly safe.

For dogs that swim regularly, this product may not work as well as others such as Program. If Advantage is not working for you, you are most likely not following a total flea control program of treating all animals in your house, premise spraying the house, the car and treating the yard as well.

Occasionally I have seen Advantage react locally with the skin causing the hair in that area to fall out, but this is rare.

Program is an oral product that contains growth inhibitor. It is given once a month and literally sterilizes the adult fleas so they cannot produce any eggs. It is very safe for both the animal and owners. The animals don't mind the taste in most cases and it is very effective when used with environmental control. Some forms of Program also include a heartworm preventative and monthly roundwormer (pyrantel pamoate). This product is especially recommended for flea problems of a larger magnitude and for long term maintenance. **It's not a good product for the flea allergic pet**, however because the flea still needs to bite the pet to ingest the growth inhibitor.

I am often asked about Frontline products. I will have to say that I have never muscle-tested this product to be safe for any pet. It sure is popular and sells like crazy (I don't carry it.) I don't know why, but Advantage and Program seem to be the safest products with the fewest chance for side effects.

Flea Shampoos provide no protection once they are rinsed off. They can provide temporary relief (a few hours with severe infestation of the environment) and will kill the fleas on the animal at the time of the bath. They are good in getting rid of the flea dirt on the skin, but they also dry the skin out and are not good for dogs with dry/flaky or oily/greasy skin. It's better to choose the correct medicated shampoo for your pet in these cases.

Apply flea spray, powder, or Advantage to the pet after the bath for longer lasting results. Any animal having skin disease along with the flea problem should see your veterinarian for proper treatment and recommendations regarding diet, shampoo and treatments.

I'm sorry to say that **B-Vitamins, Brewer's Yeast, Garlic, Cedar Chips and Herbal Flea Collars** will not kill fleas. They do, however, make the skin smell bad to the flea and will deter them. Scientific studies show a decrease of only 20% in the flea numbers with the use of these products.

Note: Cedar chips and shavings can be harmful to your pet's skin. The slivers off the chips can embed into the skin and cause tumors (that goes for rats too!). The essential oil of the wood is also very toxic and has been known to cause cancer.

Avon Skin-So-Soft is used by itself as a flea deterrent and is in **Duo-Cide** products. To use this product, add 2 tablespoons Skin-So-Soft per pint water in a pint spray bottle. Shake well just before using each time--it is an oil/water interface. Skin-So-Soft may make the coat oily and you may have to wash the pet more often as the dust will stick to this oil more readily. If your pet has allergies, this would not be a good choice. The goal is to reduce allergen exposure on the coat for allergic pets. This product would help the pollens to adhere to your pet causing more problems.

Flea combs are highly recommended for animals that cannot tolerate flea products. The challenge is to get the owners to use the comb as often as necessary to help the animal--every day. Grooming can be biweekly after you comb off no more fleas for several days in a row. Continue to use the flea comb daily for those flea-allergic pets. Fleas need to be crushed with a thumbnail as they have very hard exoskeletons.

Some fleas combs are better than others. Try to purchase one that will rake off the adult fleas, eggs, and flea dirt all at once. These combs are also excellent in the prevention of hairballs in cats (and will comb out lice in a child's hair very effectively). Fleas combs won't comb through the longer coats very easily--the tines bend and break. I like the kind imported from England. They have a great handle you can palm and metal tines that can really take a beating (or grooming.) I also use my flea comb to comb out the winter coats on my pets. They cost about \$7.00.

Treating the Pet's Environment:

In general, the products used in the environment can be more toxic and last longer than those which are applied to the animal. Never use these products directly on your pet or children unless the bottle states it is safe to do so (even then, I would question this.)

Where young children and infants are concerned, more importance is placed on safety than effectiveness. This is why it is important for you to be involved in the choices of products for your home and pets.

Premise control products kill only the susceptible stages of the fleas at the point in time they are used. They are fairly safe and can be used as the main environmental treatment in homes that have birds and fishes as pets. The frequency of fogging and spraying depends upon the temperature and humidity, degree of flea infestation, the traffic of pets in and out, the effectiveness of the products used, and the amount of household clutter in which fleas can hide.

Foggers are designed to cover large enclosed areas and are set off while all occupants (including pets) are away. They are most effective in empty spaces and in crawl spaces. In homes with furniture or items covering the floor they are not very effective. Foggers

can take care of up to 80% of the problem. Make sure you get one with a **growth inhibitor** in it.

When using foggers, remove all living things from the premises. Cover your fish tanks and remove all the birds. Read labels prior to using any foggers or premise sprays. Because the insect growth regulator Methoprene is also removed with vacuuming, vacuum or steam clean before using them and wait at least 4 days after fogging to vacuum. Foggers are basically gone after 10-15 vacuumings.

Put your dollars into growth inhibitor products for most effective and economical results.

Premise Sprays are designed for spot treatment or for difficult to reach areas and for areas which are not enclosed such as a back porch or doghouse. Use premise sprays for the baseboards, under the furniture, and between the couch cushions and around the edges of the water bed mattress.

These products last 2-3 months, are not as easily vacuumed up (they last for 20-30 vacuumings) and are very good for high traffic areas and for continuous protection. These products are broken down and become ineffective by the sun's rays. Use them for touch up in well-traveled pathways in the house where you may vacuum more often. Don't forget to treat your car if you pets travel with you (even just once to the vet.) This product is effective and a good use for your dollars.

Yard and kennel sprays are for outdoor use and should be used in accordance with manufacturer recommendations. Most fleas live within a 30-foot radius of the building -- where most pets spend their time. These sprays can be purchased at your veterinarian's office, pet shops, on-line, or at the local garden store.

Nematodes that eat flea larvae: A few years ago I carried a natural product of nematodes to sprinkle on your lawn that would kill the flea larvae. That would be a great product if it were effective. The downfalls to this product were that it had to be kept wet, the expiration dates are short, it is expensive, and one can does not go far. If anyone of you out there has found a good product like this could be, let me know!

Malathion and Sevin are the sprays used most frequently for the yard, but get inactivated by sunshine and they will not last over 3-7 days. Spray them after the sun has gone down and when you know it won't be raining for a day or two.

Housekeeping can be an extremely effective flea control measure. Vacuuming will remove flea eggs, pupae and the flea droppings used by the larvae for food. Vacuum up some flea powder or add a piece of flea collar to each new bag or burn the vacuum sweepings to prevent fleas from completing their life cycle in the compost heap or trash bag. Vacuuming EVERY DAY is essential if you don't want to use chemicals. Also, getting rid of carpet in your house helps a lot. I would also recommend an occasional shampoo of the carpets (not dry-chemical cleaning) as it will suffocate the cocoons.

A note about worms: When fleas (or mice) are ingested by your pet the tapeworm (cestode) is allowed to finish its life cycle. If you see rice-sized segments sticking to the hairs around the rectum of your pet or see the segments or "ribbon or noodle-like" worms in the stool or on the animals bedding you should contact your veterinarian for a drug to treat them. Over-the-counter worm preparations only treat nematodes (roundworms) and are not effective against tapeworms. Worming may be necessary as often as every three weeks (the life cycle of the tapeworm) depending on the severity of the flea problem.

When in doubt (especially for large dogs, which can be very expensive to worm,) bring in a fresh stool sample for a floatation. The floatation may not show eggs even though your pet has worms.

My recommendation is to worm your pets if you are seeing fleas with a good tapewormer (I use **Cestex**) and worm twice a year with pyrantel pamoate (also called **Nemex or Strongid-T**) roundwormer. Piperazine is useless these days for roundworming and no longer works at all in cats. The grocery store doses are ineffective.

If you have wormers at home and would like to try to use them up first, call your vet. We need to know the chemical name (scientific name) to be able to tell you if you have the proper medication.

NEVER give a store bought wormer to a pet who is sick unless your vet is consulted first. You may cause some severe problems--especially with triple wormers. I once had a relative give her pregnant dog a triple wormer. The dog strained so much that her uterus burst and she died.

Diatomaceous Earth: Not all diatomaceous earth (DE) is alike. Stay away from filtration types. All DE that is used for filtration purposes (pools, spas, etc) has undergone chemical and heat treatment. The heat treatment greatly increases the percentage of crystalline silica, which poses a serious inhalation risk. DE has high crystalline silica content and some DE has high levels of arsenic in it. Our local organic people recommend Perma-Guard (www.perma-guard.com). Another brand to use that is safe is Biconet. Only natural untreated DE should be used for insect control.

How does DE work? The dust clogs their breathing apparatus so they suffocate. Unfortunately it may also make asthma symptoms worsen.

Mopping with soap and mild bleach water is quite effective for flea control in those houses with no carpets. Many of my clients with flea allergic animals and inhalant allergy children eventually change over to hardwood floors and linoleum.

Flea attractant lights. What a racket. Don't waste your money on this gimmick. **White dishes filled with water and Joy dish soap:** I suspect if you are attracting fleas to this kind of contraption that you have a severe infestation and should think about doing something a bit more effective.

Well, I hope this helps your flea problem. Good luck! You'll need it.

© 2005 by Dr. Denice M. Moffat

Dr. Denice Moffat is a practicing naturopath, medical intuitive since 1993, and has worked around the veterinary field for over 31 years and has given this flea talk "about a bazillion times!" She now works on the family unit (which includes humans and animals) through her phone consultation practice established in 1993. She has a content-rich website at <http://www.NaturalHealthTechniques.com> and free monthly newsletter. For more articles on holistic veterinary techniques and animal communication, got to: http://www.naturalhealthtechniques.com/Veterinary_Stuff/veterinary_stuff1.htm