



FLEA CONTROL IN CATS

In our practice, up to 90% of all skin problems in cats are associated with fleas, although it is important to realise that cats (and other animals) can have fleas without showing any signs of disease. Only the adult flea lives on the animal; the rest of the life cycle (eggs, larva, pupa) lives in the environment. The female adult flea needs to feed from the animal in order to produce eggs. Once she lays the eggs (up to 200 eggs per flea per day!), they fall off the cat wherever the cat may be (eg into the floorboards or the grass). If the conditions are warm and humid enough, these eggs will hatch, and in approximately 3 weeks they will become adults themselves, ready to jump onto the nearest animal.

A few important points to bear in mind: in Sydney, although fleas are more common in the warmer months, we often see **fleas all the year around**; eggs can remain **viable for months** waiting for the right conditions before hatching; **indoor cats can still get fleas** (via people or other animals carrying any part of the flea life cycle into the proximity of the cat); and fleas prefer animals to humans, so if a person in the household is getting bitten, it usually means there are already a lot of fleas around.

There are a number of options for flea control, depending on the circumstances. Most people find the **spot on applications** very convenient, safe and effective. The newer ones tend to be more effective, as fleas can develop resistance to any given product over time. Some of these products (eg Revolution® and Advocate®) also cover for other parasites, such as heartworm (spread by mosquitoes) and most intestinal worms, meaning fewer medications are needed for their cat (and this is usually a good thing!).

Sometimes we recommend other products (usually Capstar® tablets which kills fleas very quickly, within 30 minutes, but only lasts for a few days), to help get rid of a large infestation of fleas, or to help with ongoing flea control in a particularly allergic cat. These will be used in conjunction with the spot on formula, and work very well together.

Totally indoor cats can be controlled effectively with a product that stops fleas from breeding, and this can be given as injection by the vet every 6 months or as a paste in the food every month. It is important to realise that the adult fleas won't be killed, and that other parasites are not covered.

Fleabites can cause anything from minor irritation to severe itchiness from **allergy** that can result in skin inflammation and infections due to self-trauma. If this happens, the cat will require veterinary attention to treat the allergy and its consequences, but the underlying fleas must also be controlled. It is important to remember that once a cat has shown signs of being allergic to fleabites, they will always be predisposed to having skin problems. It is especially important that these cats have very thorough and diligent flea control.

Once the fleas on your cat have been treated, there's still the problem of all those flea eggs and larvae in your cat's immediate environment. Generally a **thorough vacuuming** through the premises, including on and behind furniture is enough to get rid of the majority of the flea life cycle.