



Fleas Out of Control

Once you see one, it seems like they just won't go away. You start to get that itchy feeling just thinking about it. Fleas are frustrating but they are treatable, regardless of how hopeless it may seem.

Dr. Michael Dryden, otherwise known as Dr. Flea, is a professor of parasitology at Kansas State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. He and his team have evaluated tough flea problems in Florida and had 100% success in getting rid of them. Here's what you can do to have 100% success too!

Know your flea medicine

Make sure to read the package labeling carefully before deciding which flea medicine works best for your household. Learn what it does, how to apply it correctly, and when it needs to be repeated. Some flea medicines need to be reapplied after bathing or swimming.

1. **Use a flea medicine you know works.** Newer generation flea products are superior to the old products such as flea collars and shampoos. Some cheaper products simply do not kill fleas effectively.

2. **Use a flea medicine that you trust.**

Unfortunately, online and store bought medicine has the potential to be counterfeit. Make sure to inspect packaging carefully. You can find information to help you know what to look for at www.epa.gov/pets



Counterfeit medicine is very difficult to detect!

3. **Use a flea medicine that is safe.** Some flea products use older chemicals such as pyrethroids. Permethrin, one type of pyrethroid, may be in dog-only products and is very toxic to cats. Make sure to read the package and apply to the correct pet.

4. **Use a flea medicine that kills immature flea stages or before eggs are laid.** Check the package information to make sure the flea medicine you use also kills the immature stages or kills the adults before they lay eggs. Otherwise, immature stages will continue to contaminate the environment until all adult fleas are dead. This means that you will be seeing fleas for a longer period.

Treat Your House

In order to get rid of fleas completely, you need to kill the adult fleas as well as eliminate the immature stages that are in your house.

1. **Wash all bedding.** Make sure to wash bedding, rugs, blankets, etc in hot, soapy water at least once a week. Everywhere you pet spends time should be laundered.

2. **Vacuum daily.** Vacuuming is critical to picking up the immature stages in the environment. The vibrations from the vacuum will cause some pupae to hatch and be vacuumed up.



Make sure to get every nook and cranny since the immature forms love dark places. That means under chair cushions and furniture. If your pet sleeps on the bed clean between the mattress and box spring.

Vacuuming hard wood floors will get flea stages that fall into crevices.

4. **Treat the house.** Flea bombs and foggers don't always get to the problem areas, especially under furniture. Instead, use a spray that kills adults immature stages and direct it to the problem areas and under things. Make sure to follow instructions carefully and repeat as recommended. You can also call in a professional exterminator.

Recognize why flea treatment fails

Studies have shown there has been no resistance to the newer flea medicine. However, no product is 100% effective all of the time. Failure to control fleas has always been due to human error when the situation has been investigated.

Avoid the common causes of failure

1. **Treat every pet in the house.** If you only treat the pets that go outdoors, then the indoor pets end up being a reservoir for fleas. If you only treat indoor pets, then any pet that goes outdoors becomes the ride in. Either way, the life cycle cannot be broken until all animals are treated.

2. **Set up a reminder system to avoid missed doses.** Most flea medicines should be administered every 30 days. Mark your calendar to remind you when the next dose is needed.

You can download smart phone apps for reminders or sign up for email reminders. Make sure the same person gives the medicine so there is no confusion about whether or not the medicine was given.



3. **Apply the medicine directly to the skin.** Read the package directions carefully if you are using a topical product. Make sure to part the fur and apply the applicator directly against the skin. Check the tube

afterwards to make sure no medicine is remaining in the tube.

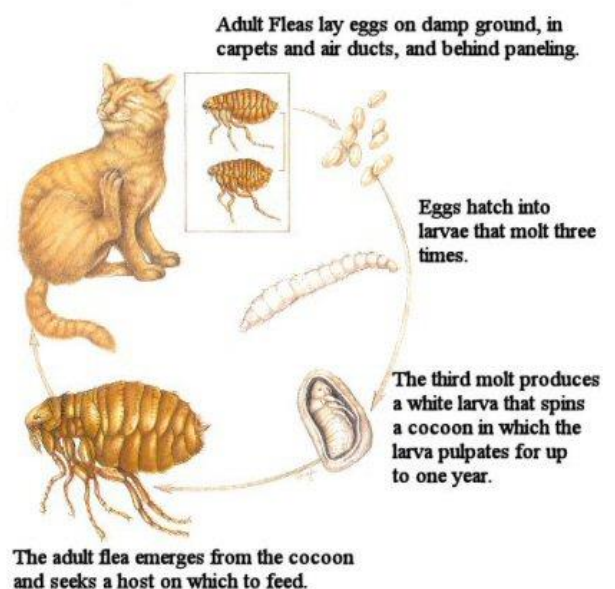
4. **Avoid baths or swimming for at least 48 hours before and after application.** Most topical medicine can be washed off immediately after application. If bathed before application, the medicine may not work well and may need to be reapplied. Read the package directions.

5. **Know the product that you are using.** Make sure to research the product to find out if it actually works. Ask your veterinary team for help.

6. **Treat the house.** Vacuum and wash bedding frequently. Make sure your flea medicine kills immature life stages or prevents eggs from being laid. Use sprays to treat the environment. If needed, call an exterminator.

7. **Treat the yard.** Most of the time, you do not need to treat the yard. However, if you do, concentrate your efforts around bushes and plants, the house foundation and under any raised decks or similar protected areas. These are areas where wildlife or stray animals are spending their time (and dropping off fleas).

Hill's Atlas of Veterinary Clinical Anatomy
Fleas



8. Treat for at least 3 consecutive months. Three months of treatment is required to kill all the immature stages in your home since no available product kills the pupae. Because of this, **even under the best circumstances, you will see fleas for a few months.**

In fact, you will often see more fleas right after treatment because of the high number of fleas in the house that are hatching out. This doesn't necessarily mean that the flea medicine is not working. If you stop treatment too soon, the fleas are allowed to return to full force.

Prevent future fleas

Make sure your pets don't become reinfested with fleas by keeping them on flea prevention year round. Fleas cannot survive winter alone, but they survive well on wildlife and stray animals. Even if your pet is indoors, they can still be exposed to fleas from wildlife. Humans can bring in fleas from the outdoors to their indoor only cats.

If you are moving, make sure to apply flea medicine to all of your pets since there may be dormant fleas in the new place.

Non-chemical treatments

Unfortunately, there are no effective, safe non-chemical treatments to kill fleas.

- Studies have shown vitamin B1 (thiamine) and brewer's yeast are not effective at all.
- There is no evidence garlic helps, and garlic can be toxic.
- Many herbal flea products are essential oils that can cause serious problems. Cats are especially sensitive to negative effects.
- Borate has been used in homes with some success but can be toxic to cats and dogs if ingested. It doesn't kill the adult fleas because the adults never willingly leave your pet.
- Diatomaceous earth contains silica and has been shown to cause lung disease in people.

- Ultrasonic devices and flea traps don't work. Light traps (devices that use a light bulb over a pan of soapy water or stick pad) do catch some fleas, but they won't control an infestation.

We hate using chemicals or medication if we can avoid it. However, fleas can cause serious health problems in your pet so it is important to get rid of them completely. That requires using proven flea products.

Summary

There is no quick easy fix to a flea infestation. It is expensive and frustrating. However, it is important to follow all the rules to be successful. You will save time and money by doing it right the first time. By keeping your pets on flea prevention year round, you can successfully avoid fleas in the future.

