

Signs of Fleas in your Pet

The most common parasite we encounter in practice is the flea. Most people know that fleas can cause their pet to scratch and recognise itching as the best clue that their furry friend might have unwanted pets of their own! There are, however, a few other things that are worth watching out for also.



Fleas are visible to the naked eye but are very fast and can jump long distances given their size. You might spot one but not seeing them does not rule out a flea problem. Far more common is to find flea dirt on your pet's coat. This will look like small black particles resembling dust or dirt. You can tell the difference between dust and flea dirt using simple kitchen roll. Comb your pet with a flea comb and tap the contents of the comb on to a wet piece of kitchen roll, fold the kitchen roll over on itself and then open it out again. Flea dirt unlike dirt will develop an orange halo around it. This is because flea dirt is produced by the flea digesting the blood of the animal that it has been feeding on.

Flea Allergies

As an owner the most tricky flea problem to spot can be when an animal is allergic to flea bites. The allergy or hypersensitivity is to the saliva of the flea so all it takes for the affected pet to develop a skin condition can be one flea to jump on, bite and jump off again. This will cause the pet to groom fastidiously but even though your pet is very itchy sometimes there are no fleas or flea dirt to spot just a very uncomfortable cat or dog. It is worth checking any other pets in the household as they may give you more clues if their coats contain flea dirt. Cats with flea allergic dermatitis (FAD) can present with a condition called miliary dermatitis. The cat's skin feels bumpy or rough with lots of little scabs present often on the lower back. The cat's hair is often very brittle and broken from overgrooming. Dogs who are allergic can present with "hotspots" or acute moist dermatitis. This is a very uncomfortable condition usually with a sudden onset over a few hours. The dog develops a red bald patch that is very oozy and intensely itchy and requires veterinary attention.

In very extreme cases where there has been a chronic or ongoing heavy flea burden anaemia can result. This is unusual to see but a reminder of how serious flea problems can become.

Treatment

The best way to prevent a flea problem is to use regular flea treatments. There are several options available and any of our team would be happy to discuss them with you. If you do think your pet might have fleas we do offer a free appointment with one of our clinical staff to confirm your suspicions and to give you the best advice on how to rid your pet of this irritating parasite. Remember only 5% of any flea problem is on your pet meaning 95% is in your environment. Not a very pleasant thought!

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Scarsdale Vets
Pride Veterinary Centre
Riverside Road
Derby DE24 8HX
Telephone: 01332 678333
www.scarsdalevets.com

