

Fleas on Dogs and Cats

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Many readers probably want to know what we recommend in the form of natural or chemical flea preventatives. This article is for general information only. So, it does not recommend specific brands or products, beyond a flea comb, and shampoos and supplements that are made from natural products, and are intended to help control fleas.

However, if your companion pet has the MDR-1 Mutation, epilepsy or is prone to seizures this animal should avoid flea preventatives that contain the chemicals, spinosad, or any of the isoxazolines. [You can check on line for the product trade names that apply here.]

Further, using flea preventatives should be reserved for situations where there is a highly likelihood of exposure or you know for certain your companion pet is prone to fleas or has fleas. Generally, you will have to go through a flea season or two to ascertain your pet's vulnerability to fleas and to any side effects of using chemical flea preventives.

Some veterinarians suggest a dietary change to a more nourishing food – particularly one that is grain-free. One highly-touted rationale is that fleas are attracted to high blood sugar levels just like mosquitoes. But, first and foremost, fleas and mosquitoes are not the same insect. Janet McAllister, Ph.D., an entomologist in the Division of Vector-Born Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that higher blood glucose levels do not attract mosquitoes. From experience, however, we know that the attraction of mosquitoes to one person over another is quite variable and can differ between the various mosquito species. Observed instances include the output of carbon dioxide, people who metabolize cholesterol quickly, certain bodily bacteria, and even exercise-induced lactic acid release.

Needless to say, this is not meant to discourage you from feeding your companion pet a healthier diet. The point is that scientific studies have not proven that increased blood glucose concentration attracts fleas. One has to remember that immunity is complex and affected by variables such as genetics, food, diseases and environment. If a dietary change helps prevent flea load on a pet, it could be correlated to a reduced sensitivity to a food because the immune system is less compromised.

My most significant personal flea experience involved two English Pointers that I bred. Cameo was orange and white with a pink nose and toenails, whereas her sister, Winnie, was black and white with a black nose and toenails. At the time, I lived near the beach and Cameo would return covered in fleas. Winnie, by contrast, might only get one or two, but they would soon jump off her onto Cameo. They ate the same food and slept on the same bed. So why did Cameo attract the fleas?

It is well-known that skin pH in humans differs along the pigmentation spectrum. The same rings true for dogs and cats. Pets with lighter skin and haircoat, like Cameo's, generally have heightened sensitivities to immunological challenges and environmental exposures.

So, yes; I believe a correlation exists between the attraction for fleas, and bodily metabolic health and immune tolerance responses. Do we know the exact correlation? No. The best preventive aid is to promote health with optimal nutrition, weight control, reduced stress and appropriate exercise. These factors will contribute to a more balanced immune system and potentially help reduce or eliminate flea (and other parasite) burdens.

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