



THE BARRACKS
VET SURGERY
MOSMAN

FLEAS ON CATS

Even the cleanest of cats and the cleanest of homes can suffer a flea infestation. Mosman itself is a particularly good habitat for fleas. It is quite difficult to get rid of fleas, but don't despair as a bit of determination and the help of modern treatments will eventually solve the problem.

What are the signs of fleas on my cat? You may notice fleas running on your cat's belly or at the base of the tail. You might also notice eggs or flea dirt on your cat or where the cat was sitting. Flea dirt is literally flea poo. It looks like black crumbs and as it contains your cat's blood, it will turn reddish/brown if you put it on a tissue with a drop of water. The flea dirt can appear as black or brown spots on the cat's bedding too. You may also notice excessive licking, unexpected movements, and of course good old scratching. Surprisingly, it's the flea's saliva that is particularly irritating, not just the bites! Secondary problems such as hair loss, miliary dermatitis and behavioural issues may also arise. Kittens with too many fleas can even get anaemia. Because fleas are a host to tapeworm, if your cats have fleas, they probably have tapeworm too. More fun! Luckily tapeworm is easy to treat ... one Milbemax[®] tablet will do the trick.

Where did the fleas come from? Any visiting pet or wandering cat can drop hundreds of eggs at your house or in your garden. They are excellent survivors, and so with the benefit of other hosts like possums or passing pets, before long they become very plentiful in the environment. Then they respond to your cat's carbon dioxide and movement, and simply jump aboard. Pets which live permanently indoors will have a much better chance of remaining flea-free, and the indoor environment is much easier to keep flea-free too.

Why are fleas so hard to get rid of? The flea has a complex and cleverly adapted life cycle which can resist treatments at various stages. It is also incredibly fast. In the right conditions, fleas can go from being an egg to being an egg layer in a week! One female flea on your cat can lay 50 tiny (0.5mm) white eggs in a day! If there are 10 fleas, that's 15,000 eggs in a month! They fall off after a few hours and as long as they don't dry out, are well protected to survive. We could talk all day about the burrowing larval stage (which can lay dormant for 6 months), then the resistant pupal stage and finally the adult flea stage, but it's all so complicated, let's just cut to the cure.

What should we do to prevent fleas? Treat every animal in the house YEAR ROUND with a monthly topspot, (a liquid that is squirted onto the back of your pet's neck). Remember to increase the dose for dogs to once a fortnight during summer, and make sure the topspot covers for ticks as well as fleas during those summer months. If your dog is a swimmer, make sure you use a water-proof treatment or keep the dog dry for two days each side of a topspot squirt. In a dog and cat household, Frontline[®] is the ideal summer choice as the other option, Advantix[®], is poisonous to cats. Brush your cat often, then use a flea comb to pick up the earliest signs of fleas.

What should we do if we already have fleas?

1. If your cat already has fleas, we recommend two medications. Firstly give the cat a topspot squirt (Frontline® or Revolution®) at least once a month. Don't forget to part the cat's hair so that the topspot makes good contact with the skin, and remember to apply it nice and high on the back of the cat's neck, where it cannot possibly be reached and licked. Secondly, we recommend a Capstar® tablet daily for 3 days, then one every second day for 6 days. The topspot squirt interrupts the flea breeding cycle and the tablet kills the adult fleas almost immediately.
2. Treat the cat's environment. Wash all the bedding and cushion covers in hot water, and make sure they are dried thoroughly, out in the sunshine is best as UV light will kill fleas and eggs. Vacuum as often as possible, in all the tiny cracks and UNDER the furniture, and double bag the dust receptacle before throwing it away. Use flea bombs or a pest controller to treat inside and outside the house, but remember to remove fish bowls, couch potatoes and all pets first.

We are doing everything you say, but we still have the rotten fleas. Where are we going wrong?

1. Remember to treat every single pet that visits or lives at your home, YEAR ROUND.
2. Remember that a topspot is not a barrier. It cannot stop the fleas from jumping on to your pet. It will only prevent them from breeding successfully. The good news is that once the flea bites the animal, or comes into contact with the product on the coat, the flea will die. If you are still having problems, increase the dose to once every three weeks or even every two weeks until you have had an effect on the population that is jumping onto your pet.
3. Only trust topspots you have bought at a Vet. Supermarket treatments can be dodgy, and flea collars and powders are not very effective, and can cause skin irritations.
4. Be vigilant that you are not leaving it one single day longer than once every four weeks to give your pet a topspot. Make a diary note or put a schedule on the fridge, where others can see it and remind you too. If you register at www.frontlineplus.com.au, they will even send you a reminder. If you miss the due date, a breakthrough infestation can occur, taking you back to square one. From there it takes 6 months for the topspot product to eradicate the problem.
5. Some topspots claim to be waterproof, but to be extra safe, do not let your dog swim or have a bath for 2 days each side of a topspot squirt. Frequent swimming may reduce the topspot's efficacy too, so apply the topspot every 2 weeks if your pet gets wet or swims daily.
6. Check you are using the correct packet for the weight of your pet. Topspots are expensive, and it is a shame to waste money by giving an ineffective amount. A larger dose is not going to work better. Increase the frequency of the dose rather than the size of the dose.
7. Check you are using a shampoo that you have purchased from a vet. The skin of cats and dogs is very different in thickness and pH from human skin. If you use an inappropriate shampoo or soap, you may strip oils from your pets' fur and remove the transport medium of some topspots. Even some flea shampoos may interfere with the efficacy of a topspot.
8. Check the environment for flea breeding spots. Fleas love shady damp areas like under a deck or in long grass. Treat these areas or block them off from access by your pets.
9. Throw out as much pet bedding as possible and start again. Wash the new bedding often in hot water and dry it in the sun.
10. Put furniture, rugs and door mats outside in the sun and sweep any shady areas outside.
11. Vacuum and steam clean as often as you can, including the skirting boards and floorboards.
12. Talk to your Vet about other possibilities. On occasion, pets may do better with alternatives or extras such as Frontline® flea growth-regulating sprays, a tablet like Proban® every second day, an injection of Program® for cats, or the monthly Sentinel® tablet. However we usually recommend the topspot as the cheaper and more effective treatment.
13. If you have been using the Frontline® topspot and have diligently followed all the suggestions above, but you still have fleas, phone Merial. They are the manufacturers of Frontline®, and they will make an appointment to come to your home during which time they will make an appraisal of the environment and pinpoint problem issues. Their phone number is (02) 9893 0000, or you can write to them at Level 6, 79 George St Parramatta NSW 2150.