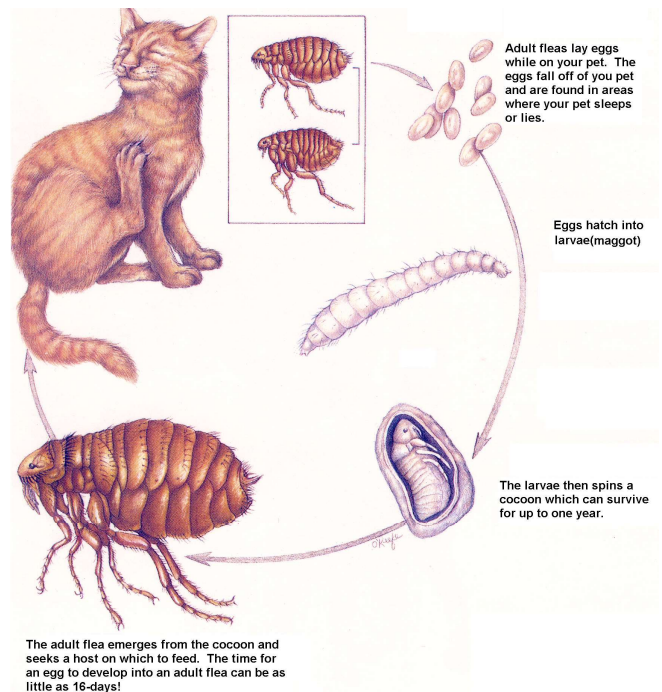


FLEA ALLERGIES

What are allergies, and how do they affect dogs & cats?

One of the most common conditions affecting dogs and cats is allergy. In the allergic state, the pet's immune system "overreacts" to foreign substances (allergens or antigens). These overreactions appear in three ways. The most common is itching of the skin, either localized (one area) or generalized (all over the dog). Another way involves the respiratory system and may result in coughing, sneezing, and/or wheezing. Sometimes, there may be an associated nasal or ocular (eye) discharge. The third way they appear involves the digestive system, resulting in vomiting or diarrhea. The specific response that occurs is related to the type of allergy present.



Does that mean that there several types of allergies?

There are five known types of allergies in the pets: contact, flea, food, bacterial, and inhalant. Each of these has some common expressions in dogs, and each has some unique features.

What is meant by the term flea allergy?

In spite of common belief, a normal dog or cat experiences only minor skin irritation in response to flea bites. Even in the presence of dozens of fleas, there will be very little itching. On the other hand, the flea allergic pet has a severe exaggerated reaction to flea bites. This occurs because the pet develops an allergic response to the flea's saliva. When the pet is bitten, flea saliva is deposited in the skin. Just one bite causes intense itching.

What is the proper treatment?

The most important treatment for flea allergy is to get the pet away from all fleas. Therefore, strict flea control is the backbone of successful treatment. There are many products available for flea control, and many work in an entirely different manner. In some cases, multiple products may be needed. Some are used on the pet and some in the pet's environment. Unfortunately, complete flea control is not always possible for pets that live outdoors in warm and humid climates, where a new population of fleas can hatch out every 16 days.

When strict flea control is not possible, medication can be used to block the allergic reaction and give relief. This is often a necessary part of dealing with flea allergy. Some pets respond best to long-acting injectable medication and others to oral medication. Cats are more resistant to the side-effects of steroids than dogs, but significant side-effects can occur in both. For this reason, the goal is to administer the smallest amount of steroid needed to keep the pet comfortable.