



NATURAL FLEA PREVENTION FOR DOGS

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THE ISSUE

Fleas are a biting parasite that can cause symptoms ranging from itching and scratching to flea allergy dermatitis (FAD). Fleas also transmit parasites including tapeworms and infectious diseases to dogs. The cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felix*, is the most commonly found flea in the US. The cat flea infests cats, dogs, and other mammals. Adult fleas live on dogs or other animals, and their diet consists of small quantities of their host's blood. The adult female flea lays up to 50 eggs per day, and the eggs fall off the animal onto carpet, bedding, soil other surfaces. Flea eggs hatch into larvae two days to two weeks later. Larvae eat organic matter in their environment for 5 to 18 days and then spin a cocoon to form a pupa. A few days to a year later, an adult flea emerges. The complete life cycle of a flea can be as short as two weeks or as long as two years—which is why dog owners have to remain eternally vigilant against these maddening little devils.

Natural approaches enable most dog owners to prevent flea infestations and maintain a healthy dog and a comfortable home. But natural remedies are generally less effective in quickly reversing serious flea infestations. With severe infestations, dog owners may want to consider topical applications prescribed by veterinarians or a pesticide. Please see our Solution for *Dogs with Flea Allergy Dermatitis or Flea Infestation* for information on using a pesticide for flea treatment. While effective, these high-impact approaches with heavy repeated use may negatively impact the long-term health of dogs, humans and the environment, and we believe in using them on an as needed basis with some dog owners avoid them entirely by following a year-round regimen of natural flea prevention.

WARNING FOR DOG OWNERS WHO ALSO CARE FOR CATS

Cats are very sensitive to many of the chemical and natural ingredients used in flea killers and flea repellents. Never use a flea product—chemical or natural—on a cat unless it is specifically labeled for use on cats.

WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

See your veterinarian if you have a severe infestation that has not improved after trying several approaches for a month (or sooner if your patience gives out). If your dog has significant hair loss, bleeding or smelly skin, see your veterinarian. If your dog (or cat) begins to vomit, drool heavily, twitch or shake, immediately call your veterinarian and strip the product off your animal by bathing with Dawn dish detergent.

THE SOLUTION

Some dogs will be helped with just one or two of the approaches listed below. Other dogs may require more changes. We've starred (*) the approaches we recommend trying first.

1 Naturally eliminate and repel fleas from your dog

For the best results, all animals in the house must be treated for fleas at the same time, but these recommendations are for dogs only. Some ingredients that are safe for dogs are very unsafe for cats.

- ***Bathe to remove and repel fleas.** Bathing with soap drowns adult fleas and helps remove eggs. Fleas hide in unwashed areas, so wash every part of your dog including its head. Bathe at least once a month using a shampoo that includes a natural flea repellent.
- ***Use a natural flea repellent.** During flea season, use a flea repellent that includes cedar, neem, geraniol, or tea tree oil every two or three days or as indicated on the label. Double-check the safety of products containing essential oils before using on very small dogs, who may have a negative reaction to essential oils.
- **Use a flea comb** to physically remove fleas and to see how flea-free (or not) your dog is. Drown fleas you catch in your comb by dipping in warm soapy water.
- **Relieve itchy skin** with a natural anti-itch spray or herbal skin supplement.

2 Naturally eliminate and repel fleas from your home

Mud Bay and its staff strive to help dog and cat owners improve the health of their animals and to increase the happiness owners experience in caring for their animals by providing natural foods, well-made supplies and useful information. Mud Bay and its staff do not diagnose or treat specific conditions, and the information provided by Mud Bay's staff, publications, website and other media are not substitutes for treatment by a veterinarian.

- ***Vacuum your house frequently.** Vacuuming is blissfully safe, and it really works. Vacuuming eliminates fleas in every stage of their life, and it eliminates the food larvae feed on. Vacuum every few days, paying particular attention to the places your dog spends the most time. Buy a chemical flea collar from the grocery store and keep it in your vacuum cleaner bag to kill the fleas you've vacuumed up or empty your vacuum bag/container immediately after vacuuming.
- ***Wash and dry bedding, clothing, and toys.** Soap and water in the washer drowns adult fleas, and high heat in the dryer kills fleas in all stages of life. After washing, spray bedding and dog clothing with the same natural repellent you spray your dog with.
- ***Treat the home and yard.** Diatomaceous earth is a natural substance that acts as a desiccant, killing fleas by dehydrating them. Sprinkle it in the house and yard, wherever your dogs and cats spend time. Pay special attention to carpets, furniture, hard-to-reach areas (like corners and cracks), and dogs' and cats' favorite sleeping places. You may also work diatomaceous earth directly into fur and carpet with brushing or sweeping. Although DE is not a dangerous chemical, limit the amount of dust that you and your animals inhale. Use a mask when applying and let dust settle for an hour or two before you or your animals return to a treated area.

3 Strengthen your dog's skin

By helping your dog's skin and coat become as strong and as healthy as possible, you'll make your dog a less attractive host for fleas and reduce the secondary problems caused by fleas and flea bites.

- ***Switch to a diet specifically designed to strengthen skin and coat.** Raw diets are an especially good choice for improving skin and coat health. If you would like to know if a raw diet is a good fit for your dog, please ask a Muddy to show you our simple decision tool *Can Your Dog Benefit From Raw Foods?* to aid you in finding the right raw diet for your dog.
- ***Supplement with digestive enzymes** to help your dog get the best possible results from whatever diet he is eating. Look for products with Protease, Amylase, Cellulase, or Lipase.
- ***Essential fatty acid supplements** support healthy skin and coat as well as overall canine health. Consider adding salmon oil, pollock oil or another supplement containing Omega-3s.

RESULTS

You should see improvement within a day or two of treating your dog and house, but because the lifecycle of a flea is measured in weeks, you'll have to keep vacuuming, shampooing and spraying. If you're still having problems after a month of diligent treatment, you may need to enlist the help of a stronger product from your veterinarian. After you get the problem under control, you can probably switch back to natural prevention.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Please take real care in using flea products. The artificial—and even some of the natural—ingredients used to kill and repel fleas can permanently injure or even kill some animals. Cats are particularly susceptible. If you have any doubts about whether something is safe, we recommend not using it until you know for sure.
- Flea Allergy Dermatitis (FAD) is the most common allergic condition in dogs. It's caused by a reaction to flea saliva, and about one in four dogs suffers from it. FAD can cause intense itching and discomfort for up to two weeks after a bite—long after the flea is gone. Owners of dogs with FAD may decide that the possible negative impacts of pesticide flea treatments are outweighed by the negative impacts of flea bites. Dogs getting routine pesticide flea treatments are still likely to benefit from many of the preventative measures outlined above.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

Mud Bay staffers are specifically trained to help dog owners with fleas. Muddies can also help you find the products that match the recommendation on this sheet, so if you need more help or information, please let us know.