



## **Flea Control, a Holistic Perspective**

Fleas can be extremely harmful parasites. Not only do they cause a tremendous amount of irritation to their hosts but they are also responsible for flea allergy dermatitis, the transmission of other parasites such as tapeworm and Haemobartonella (outside of New Zealand, there are a number of other parasites they transmit) and they are capable of infesting young animals so severely that the amount of blood which they suck leaves these animals anemic.

Fleas have evolved with their hosts for thousands and thousands of years and as with all parasites, it is virtually impossible to completely eradicate them. However, in any given population of animals, some individuals will have a greater flea burden than others indicating that some animals have qualities that make them less hospitable to these parasites. Some of these tendencies are genetic but an excessive flea burden is often an indication that an animal has a weakened immune system.

A healthy animal in a healthy and suitable environment (some breeds are not suited to the hot and humid climates in which they live) is unlikely to have an excessive parasite burden. From a Holistic point of view we question why the fleas are present on a specific individual and endeavor to re-establish balance so that natural harmony is restored and there isn't an overpopulation of fleas.

There are a number of ways to reduce flea numbers. Firstly supporting your pet's immune system with good nutrition will go a long way to making them less tasty to fleas. Vitamin B's and garlic in particular are wonderful aids but be cautious with garlic as it can be toxic in excess to dogs and cats. Various herbs, essential oils and a citrus wash can be used externally as flea repellants and regular flea combing will help to monitor flea numbers and reduce them further.

Sometimes these gentle methods are not enough to deter fleas and the animal may benefit from other supportive therapies or might need the assistance of stronger commercial products which are exceptionally effective at killing fleas and have their place helping to preserve the quality of life of our pets. Some of these products are more toxic than others so use your discretion and seek your vet's advice with which one to use. Ideally avoid those which kill worms as well, as they have much greater systemic absorption.

Typically the number of fleas on any dog or cat is only the tip of the ice berg reflecting a much greater flea population in the animal's environment of both adult and immature fleas. Therefore addressing the environment is a very important component of flea control.

Cedar, eucalyptus or pennyroyal oils on dogs' bedding may be used to deter fleas but are toxic if ingested. Immature fleas can be destroyed by regularly hanging pet bedding out in the sunshine, thoroughly vacuuming carpets on a regular basis and sprinkling them with borax or diatomaceous earth afterwards.

By using a holistic approach to manage both animals and their environment, and by respecting natural principles, animals can be kept flea free and healthy.