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# Paws for Pets

## Win the War on Fleas

Six tools for owners

by Dr. Kim Robertson

### Prevent fleas; prevent infection

That was several years ago. Overall, flea products today are safer, easier to use, and more effective in the war against fleas. While we won't rid the world of fleas, we can control their numbers in our pets' environment and relieve some of our pets' suffering. Because fleas are the intermediate host of the dog and cat tapeworm, flea control is essential in preventing tapeworm infections in these pets.

Fleas are wingless, bloodsucking insects with flat bodies and three pairs of powerful legs. The most common flea found on dogs and cats is *Ctenocephalides felis*, the cat flea. Under the right conditions, an adult flea can live on the pet for many weeks, taking a blood meal every one or two days. A very small puppy or kitten with a massive flea infestation can become anemic if the fleas are allowed to go unchecked.

Even though the adult flea spends most of its life on the dog or cat, the majority of the flea's life cycle (which includes egg stage and immature forms) is spent in the environment off the pet. With ideal temperature and humidity conditions, the prolific adult female flea can lay hundreds of eggs during her lifetime. It has been estimated that for every one adult flea found on the pet, there are 100 to 200 immature fleas in the environment. Therefore, when waging the war on fleas in, it is important to remember to treat the environment.

Flea treatment and control involve many products designed for use on the pet or in the environment. Wise selection and proper use of

these products will give you the best results when combating fleas.

### Flea shampoos

Flea shampoos, when used correctly, will kill the majority of fleas on the pet but provide poor long-term activity once the pet is rinsed. They are great to use if the pet is covered in fleas and you want an immediate kill and want to clean your pet at the same time.

### Flea sprays

Flea sprays, powders, mousses, and dips are generally more effective in controlling fleas because they stay on the pet's coat longer. Apply these after bathing and drying your pet. I generally recommend using a powder or mousse on cats as they can become frightened of sprays.

### Rinses

Many rinses or dips are for use on dogs only (they may be toxic to cats), so read all directions well. When using flea dips, follow the dilution directions carefully, apply to the pet in a well-ventilated area, wear gloves, and do not rinse the pet.

### Flea collars

Flea collars can provide some protection by decreasing the number of fleas on the pet. For outdoor cats, I recommend breakaway flea collars, which give some measure of safety should the collar become caught on an object.

### Flea birth control

Your veterinarian may also have some of the newer flea birth-control products in either an oral form (available to dogs and cats) or an injectable form (available to only cats). Once the female flea ingests the product, she is unable to lay healthy eggs. The newer topical

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### Dates of Interest in June:

- ☉ June 4th: Hug Your Cat Day
- ☉ June 5th: World Environment Day
- ☉ June 8th: Best Friends Day
- ☉ June 14th: Flag Day
- ☉ June 19th: Father's Day

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### Inside this issue:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Win the War on Fleas 2 continued        | 2 |
| Preventing Dog Bites                    | 2 |
| Myths & Facts about Spaying & Neutering | 3 |
| Senior Americans:                       | 4 |

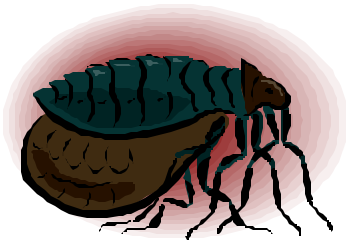
## Win the War on Fleas cont.

adulticides (which kills adult fleas) are applied to the pet's coat once a month and are very effective. In very young animals, I still recommend using a flea comb to remove live fleas by hand. You should avoid putting products on the pet until it is older than 8 or 9 weeks.

### Environmental control

Because 95 percent of the total flea population is in the environment, strict environmental control is an important aspect of overall treatment. Fleas lay their eggs on the pet continuously. As the eggs drop off, they will be found in highest concentrations where your pet spends most of its time: bedding, the kennel, or a favorite spot on the rug.

Vacuuming and using premise sprays or carpet powders will greatly reduce the number of eggs and immature fleas in the home. Outside, fleas live in shady areas where there are leaves and



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debris. Raking and sweeping these areas will allow sunlight (which fleas don't like) to penetrate; follow with outdoor flea sprays to eliminate remaining fleas. Consider, too, having a professional service treat your home and yard; the effectiveness and guarantee are often worth the expense.

Your pet will live a more comfortable and healthier life once you've gained the upper hand in the war on fleas. Smitty has become relaxed and friendlier since the insects that once made her so miserable stopped sharing her life.

### Tip: Treat the environment

To properly fight flea infestation in your home, all pets and the environment need to be treated. Consult your veterinarian to plan your overall flea control strategy, and follow all product labels carefully for best results.

## Preventing Dog Bites

There is no way to guarantee that your dog will never bite someone. But you can significantly reduce the risk. Here's how:

- **Spay or neuter your dog.** This important and routine procedure will reduce your dog's desire to roam and fight with other dogs, making safe confinement an easier task. Spayed or neutered dogs are much less likely to bite.
- **Socialize your dog.** Introduce your dog to many different types of people and situations so that he or she is not nervous or frightened under normal social circumstances.
- **Train your dog.** Accompanying your dog to a training class is an excellent way to socialize him and to learn proper training techniques. Training your dog is a family matter. Every member of your household should learn the training techniques and participate in your dog's education. Never send your dog away to be trained; only you can teach your dog how to behave in your home. Note that training classes are a great investment even for experienced dog caregivers.
- **Teach your dog appropriate behavior.** Don't teach your dog to chase after or attack others, even in fun. Your dog can't always understand the difference between play and real-life situations. Set appropriate limits for your dog's behavior. Don't wait for an accident. The first time he exhibits dangerous behavior toward any person, seek professional help from your veterinarian, an animal be-

haviorist, or a qualified dog trainer. Your community animal care and control agency or humane society may also offer helpful services. Dan-



gerous behavior toward other animals may eventually lead to dangerous behavior toward people, and is also a reason to seek professional help.

- **Be a responsible dog owner.** License your dog as required by law, and provide regular veterinary care, including rabies vaccinations. For everyone's safety, don't allow your dog to roam alone. Make your dog a member of your family: Dogs who spend a great deal of time alone in the backyard or tied on a chain often become dangerous. Dogs who are well-socialized and supervised are much less likely to bite.
- **Err on the safe side.** If you don't know how your dog will react to a new situation, be cautious. If your dog may panic in crowds, leave him at home. If your dog overreacts to visitors or delivery or service personnel, keep him in another room. Work with professionals to help your dog become accustomed to these and other situations. Until you are confident of his behavior, however, avoid stressful settings.

## Myths & Facts about Spaying & Neutering



**MYTH:** *My pet will get fat and lazy.*

**FACT:** The truth is that most pets get fat and lazy because their owners feed them too much and don't give them enough exercise.

**MYTH:** *It's better to have one litter first.*

**FACT:** Medical evidence indicates just the opposite. In fact, the evidence shows that females spayed before their first heat are typically healthier. Many veterinarians now sterilize dogs and cats as young as eight weeks of age. Check with your veterinarian about the appropriate time for these procedures.

**MYTH:** *My children should experience the miracle of birth.*

**FACT:** Even if children are able to see a pet give birth—which is unlikely, since it usually occurs at night and in seclusion—the lesson they will really learn is that animals can be created and discarded as it suits adults. Instead, it should be explained to children that the real miracle is life and that preventing the birth of some pets can save the lives of others.

**MYTH:** *But my pet is a purebred.*

**FACT:** So is at least one out of every four pets brought to animal shelters around the country. There are just too many dogs and cats—mixed breed *and* purebred.

**MYTH:** *I want my dog to be protective.*

**FACT:** Spaying or neutering does not affect a dog's natural instinct to protect home and family. A dog's personality is formed more by genetics and environment than by sex hormones.

**MYTH:** *I don't want my male dog or cat to feel like less of a male.*

**FACT:** Pets don't have any concept of sexual identity or ego. Neutering will not change a pet's basic personality. He doesn't suffer any kind of emotional reaction or identity crisis when neutered.

**MYTH:** *But my dog (or cat) is so special, I want a puppy (or kitten) just like her.*

**FACT:** A dog or cat may be a great pet, but that doesn't mean her offspring will be a carbon copy. Professional animal breeders who follow generations of bloodlines can't guarantee they will get just what they want out of a particular litter. A pet owner's chances are even slimmer. In fact, an entire litter of puppies or kittens might receive all of a pet's (and her mate's) worst characteristics.

**MYTH:** *It's too expensive to have my pet spayed or neutered.*

**FACT:** The cost of spaying or neutering depends on the sex, size, and age of the pet, your veterinarian's fees, and a number of other variables. But whatever the actual price, spay or neuter surgery is a one-time cost—a relatively small cost when compared to all the benefits. It's a bargain compared to the cost of having a litter and ensuring the health of the mother and litter; two months of pregnancy and another two months until the litter is weaned can add up to significant veterinary bills and food costs if complications develop. Most importantly, it's a very small price to pay for the health of your pet and the prevention of the births of more unwanted pets.

**MYTH:** *I'll find good homes for all the puppies and kittens.*

**FACT:** You may find homes for all of your pet's litter. But each home you find means one less home for the dogs and cats in shelters who need good homes. Also, in less than one year's time, each of your pet's offspring may have his or her own litter, adding even more animals to the population. The problem of pet overpopulation is created and perpetuated one litter at a time.

## Senior Partners: Older Americans & Mature Pets



By Rebecca Simmons

When Marjorie Smith walked into the Idaho Humane Society in Boise two years ago, the 72-year-old was struggling with the recent loss of her son and the 9-11 tragedy.

Like thousands of other seniors, Smith was battling a problem that threatened to consume her. The retired secretary wasn't suffering from cancer or heart disease, but from loneliness. Divorced and living alone, Smith

was looking for something, or someone, to help her.

Gus had been waiting patiently, but his family still hadn't come back for him. A ten-year-old Scottish terrier, he had spent his entire life with the same family. But once the children had grown up and moved away, Gus was forced to spend his days alone. His family felt that they didn't have the time to take care of him anymore and decided to relinquish Gus to the local shelter.

It's a common scenario all across America. Divorce ends marriages, children move, family and friends pass away and, as we age, loneliness and depression become all too familiar. But many seniors have found a way to combat isolation—by adopting a pet through their local shelter.

When Smith saw Gus walk into the Humane Society's waiting room, she was impressed with his attitude. "He walked with dignity and made me smile," she says. Smith adopted Gus on the spot, and they became fast friends, spending their days taking walks around the neighborhood and lounging in the rocking chair. "We bonded immediately, and I have never been sorry for a moment that I went to the shelter that evening," says Smith.

### And It's Good for You, Too

"Emotionally, pets can bring new meaning and purpose to the life of a senior who is living far away from friends or family," says Kelly Connolly, HSUS issues specialist for companion animals. "The unconditional love and commitment to their owners is almost like free therapy. They can act as friends, entertainers, and warm, fuzzy bundles of joy. Having a pet in an elderly person's life can offer them a sense of well being, a sense of encouragement, and even a reason for living. Being responsible for another life often gives new meaning to the lives of those who are living alone or far from loved ones. Caring for and providing a loving home to a companion animal also helps elderly people to remain active and stay healthy."

Gus has made Smith a believer in the power of pet companionship. "He has changed [my life] completely. I'm sure he has added years to my life. I have found that adopting a pet can help a person after a death of a loved one or just being lonely. I can't imagine what it would be like without him. I am lonely only if I have to leave him at the vet for a short time."

In addition to easing loneliness, pets may also make seniors healthier. Studies suggest that contact with animals can lower blood pressure. Research also indicates a link between pet ownership and an increased survival rate for cardiac patients. Other potential health benefits can include decreased stress, reduced bone loss, lowered cholesterol levels, and improved blood circulation.

"For years, it's been medically documented that companion animals—such as dogs, cats and rabbits—help people live longer and healthier lives," says Connolly.

### Taking the Next Step

Although animals make great companions for people of any age, pets can have important benefits for seniors. But before adopting a new companion, seniors need to understand the amount of dedication that goes into caring for an animal. Seniors need to be sure they have the time and the means to care for a pet, both physically and financially.

It's also important to consider the kind of pet to adopt. Animal care professionals often advise seniors to consider adopting an adult dog or cat. An older animal may be a better fit for their lifestyle than a puppy or kitten.

"Unlike a puppy or kitten, adult animals are more likely to be calm, already housetrained and less susceptible to unpredictable behavior," says Connolly. "Older pets are often more easily physically managed by seniors than a stronger, more excitable younger animal."

### Ready, Set, Adopt

Once the decision to adopt a pet has been made there are many programs out there to help. As more people discover the benefits of animal companionship for older Americans, resources and programs have emerged to make finding and keeping a new pet much easier.

The first place to which seniors should turn is their local shelter. Adopting from a shelter has its advantages. Not only do they have a great selection of adult animals for adoption, but they also have purebred animals. In fact, on average, purebreds account for about 25% of a shelter's dog population. If you have a specific breed in mind that's not available at your local shelter, breed placement groups (often referred to as "rescues") are also a reliable option.

Adopting from a shelter is not only a great way to help out a homeless animal, but it's also cost-effective. Adoption fees, which are extremely low compared with the cost of purchasing an animal from a pet store or breeder, typically include vaccinations as well as spay or neuter procedures.

Another advantage of shelters is that many of them offer senior programs. The Idaho Humane Society, where Smith adopted Gus, has placed thousands of pets with seniors through a program called Pets for People, which waives the adoption fee, spay/neuter charge and initial vaccination when a senior adopts an adult pet.

Check with your local shelter to see if it has a seniors program. If not, shelters can still offer a wealth of information and support to new pet owners.