



# Navarro Small Animal Clinic

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## Fleas & Flea Allergies

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An allergy is a disease in which the body's immune system reacts abnormally to everyday substances. This over-reaction to a substance is called an allergic reaction, and may be caused by dust, weeds, molds, grass, foods, fleas, as well as many other materials. Skin allergy problems, or allergic dermatitis, is very common in pets.

**The main types of allergies are:**

- flea
- atopy (inhalant allergic dermatitis)
- food allergies

**The most common allergy seen in the dog and cat is the result of flea bites!** This is known as flea bite hypersensitivity or flea allergy dermatitis. The pet becomes allergic to the **saliva** transmitted by the bite of the flea. It only takes one flea bite to set off an allergic reaction in a flea allergic pet. Pets can develop flea allergies at any age but most commonly they are at least 6 months old.

**The severity of itching does not necessarily reflect the number of fleas present.** Many times there will be no fleas on the pet when it is examined, which may cause doubt that fleas are the problem. Flea dirt or feces may be found which looks like tiny black pieces of dirt. **The areas of skin most commonly affected are the hind areas, over the tail head, the back and inner thighs**, but can affect any area of skin. The skin may become red, inflamed, scabby, and infected. Fleas *must* be kept off the pet to control flea allergic dermatitis.

Flea allergies in our furry friends are a very common problem that we come across starting during the springtime and extending well into the fall. Since South Texas does not have a true winter it is important to keep your pet on a flea preventative year round. During the warmer times of the year it is critical to **treat your home and yard for fleas**. These areas are a perfect environment for a flea infestation and can lead to re-infestation of your pet.

Here are some tips about flea treatments for your pets.

- **Flea shampoos** are only effective for a day or less. They leave little if any chemical residue on your pet.
- **Flea dips** contain harsh chemical and only last one to two weeks. Over-the-counter flea collars are only effective for adult fleas and are mostly effective around the head and neck.

- **Flea powders or sprays** offer short-term protection (two to three days). Spot-on treatments are effective for a month and some contain ingredient that prevent larvae from hatching or developing.
- **Topical medications** can contain a variety of medications. These can range from very safe to very harsh chemicals. Talk to your veterinarian before applying ANY topical medication to your pet.
- **Oral medications** move systemically through your pet and kill when fleas ingest the blood from your pet. There are oral medications that last anywhere from one to three months available from your veterinarian.

## **Treat the Environment**

**Not only is flea control for your pet important, but environmental treatment is a imperative in flea prevention.** Any flea medication can get overwhelmed if the flea burden is high.

Outside your home in shaded areas such as porches, decks, and around doghouses fleas can reproduce and overwhelm your yard. It is also important to remember that fleas are very resistant and can survive in a wide range of temperatures. There is no guarantee that you will not see fleas during the winter, especially here in south Texas where our winters are very mild. Flea eggs can lay dormant for weeks to months, just waiting to hatch and infest your yard and home.

In your home fleas can be found in pet beds, under furniture, and buried deep in carpets or around base boards.

- Daily vacuuming is very important in flea eradication. It helps to get rid of adults, eggs, larvae and pupae before they can further develop and hatch. You will want to dispose of the vacuum contents or bags into an outside garbage can to prevent contamination of your home garbage can.
- Keep all baseboards clean and consistently wash your pet's bedding, clothing, and removable furniture covers. Ideally this should be a weekly process.
- You can use foggers, flea bombs, insecticide sprays, or a professional to help eliminate fleas in your home.

Some tips to prevent flea infestations:

- Avoid large brush piles and excessive amounts of weeds, as these are great breeding grounds for the pesky flea.
- Keeping grass routinely cut can also cut down on the flea population.
- Prevent rodents from coming into your yard and home since they can carry fleas into your yard and home.
- Treat your yard on a regular basis so that adult fleas and their eggs are killed. You can use non-toxic diatomaceous earth, sprays, or a professional terminator. **When using insecticide sprays, follow all directions carefully.** Remove all pets and people from the environment for the recommended time specified by the pesticide label.