

Many of us who are isolated and live alone choose to have a four legged friend for love and companionship. Most individuals with allergy and chemical sensitivities live in a permanent state of avoidance of known triggers to maintain some quality of life and once again, avoidance is the key to successful dog companionship and dealing with the inevitable fleas.

The choice of dog type is most important as some individuals are allergic to things such as animal dander or dog hair. Most dogs normally drop a lot of hair so it is important to avoid reactions and choose a breed of dog that doesn't drop hair. These are breeds such as poodles, maltese, shitzu and lhasa apso. While most of these are small i.e. lap dogs and very companionable, the down side is that you need to brush them daily as they have long hair and will also require regular clipping. The other problem is that if you are chemically sensitive, you cannot use pesticide rinses or treatments, or essential oils to reduce or avoid flea infestations.

Prevention in the form of environmental control is always the best way to approach flea infestations. Some tips for this are:

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overall health and nutrition of the dog

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minimise contact with other dogs and animals

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habitat denial

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vacuuming

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washing

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nit combing

Nutritional status of the dog

Like humans, animals need a well balanced diet of good quality food for maximum health and nutrition. Some dogs suffer from allergies as do humans and care needs to be taken to avoid foods and dog care products that can cause reactions. Insect bites can be added to the list of things to which dogs are allergic and some dogs are allergic to flea bites, mossaie, midge, ant bites and other biting insects. Nutritional supplementation for dogs is as essential as it is to humans. If allergy to biting insects is an issue, vitamin B1 can act as an insect repellent so is a good addition to the supplement regime. Fish oil is also good to avoid arthritis later in life and if you have an allergy dog Evening Primrose Oil is good as well.

Minimising contact with other dogs and animals

If your dog does not have any fleas you may sometimes notice that after visiting someone else with a dog and/or carpet you may have developed a flea problem. This can be worse if there is carpet as well as a dog, because carpet is known to harbour fleas.

Habitat denial

One of the best ways to avoid fleas is habitat denial i.e. providing an environment that is not conducive to harboring fleas. This allows optimum management of the problem to reduce the incidence of flea infestations. A house with ceramic tiles, lino or polished timber floors will harbour less fleas than a house that is carpeted. Keep garden beds away from the house to avoid fleas that are in dirt and mow the lawn regularly as a method of avoidance. Frequent hot washing of floors and places where fleas can hide will greatly assist to ensure no fleas and a flea free dog. Washing the floors with vinegar will assist to control fleas as vinegar acts as a repellent and can also kill them. Sprinkling diatomaceous earth around places where fleas can breed will also reduce numbers.

Vacuuming

One of the best methods of managing the home environment to reduce/eliminate fleas is frequent vacuuming. Fleas like to inhabit dark, damp places so these need the most attention. Floors need to be vacuumed at least weekly as do soft furnishings and dog bedding. Fleas can harbour between the cracks of hardwood flooring and in any cracks around the edge of tiled floors or other areas so ensure that these areas are well vacuumed. Treating as per house dust mite will also control fleas, so constant steam cleaning, hot washing and airing of the dog bedding, mats and soft furnishings is essential to manage the environment. Don't forget while you have the vacuum cleaner out to clean the house, vacuum the dog as well using the brush for soft furnishings. Make dog vacuuming a pleasurable time, the vacuum used correctly can provide a pleasurable massage for your pet. However, some dogs are afraid of the vacuum cleaner so unfortunately this is not always an option or needs dog training to manage the vacuuming.

Washing the dog

If you are not using flea treatments or other methods of natural flea control the best method of attack is to wash the dog weekly and whilst it is soaped up comb through with a nit comb to reduce as many fleas as possible in the wash. Also, use a jet of water strong enough to blast the fleas out of the coat. A hand held shower attachment is a good dog washing aid as it allows a good, strong jet of water. Use a vinegar rinse to repel any remaining fleas. If you live near the sea, a weekly wash in the sea or when there is a flea infestation is a good aid to flea removal as fleas do not like sea water. Sea water is also good for the dog's skin if it has developed eczema from insect bites or has a skin condition. Drying the dog with a hair dryer can also kill nits but care needs to be taken to ensure that the dog's skin is not burnt in the process.

Nit combing

Daily brushing and combing with a nit comb will physically reduce fleas and nits from your dog and is a good tool to pesticide free flea control. Daily nit combing is the best way to minimise and control flea attacks. Daily brushing and nit combing will also reduce the amount of dog hair inside your house.

While it is a bit of extra work in your day to avoid fleas in your pet, your flea free dog will love you more and be a better companion when it is not constantly itching.

Written By: *By Dorothy M Bowes* May 31, 2009

Further Information:

Chemical fallout from pet flea collars

In the USA more than US \$1 billion dollars are spent on products to kill fleas and ticks on

household pets, especially dogs and cats. Some of these products are not safe and leave harmful chemical residues on our pets fur, in our homes in places in which pets lie around, and on individuals who handle these pets. Some such chemicals are highly hazardous to animals and humans and can damage the brain, central nervous system and cause cancer. The US based National Research Development Council (NRDC) released a paper in April 2009 called *Poison on Pets 11*

which was a first-of-its-kind study

by NRDC showing that high residues of pesticides from flea collars can remain on a dog or cat's fur for weeks after such a collar is used.

The residues levels from some collars are so high that they pose a risk of cancer and damage to children's neurological system 1000 times higher than EPA's acceptable exposure levels. Children are at particular risk from these pesticides because their systems are still developing. They are also likely to put their hands in their mouths after handling a pet so are more likely to ingest the harmful pesticides. NRDC found that residues from two pesticides used in flea collars—tetrachlorvinphos and propoxur, which are among the most dangerous pesticides still legally on the market—were high enough to pose a risk to both children and adults who play with their pets. California has already determined that one of these pesticides, propoxur, causes cancer and that consumer warnings are required. NRDC claim that California's laws are not enough—the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should step in to ban these dangerous products nationwide. Retailers should help keep pets and families safe by pulling products that contain tetrachlorvinphos and propoxur from their shelves. NRDC's 2000 *Poisons on Pets* report led to a ban on six other pesticides in pet products, but products containing tetrachlorvinphos and propoxur are still on store shelves. The availability of many effective and safer alternatives for flea and tick control makes the continued use of these pesticides an unnecessary risk

- Miriam Rotkin-Ellman, MPH; Gina Solomon MD, MPH. 2009. *Poison on Pets II: Toxic Chemicals in Flea and Tick Collars*

. More at <http://www.nrdc.org/health/poisonsonpets/>