PARASITES COME IN MANY SHAPES AND SIZES, and all of them feed off of your dog or cat. Fleas do not climb like ticks; rather, they hop or jump onto their hosts. They spend most of their life off of their hosts, and only adult fleas need a warm body to survive. Fleas will also bite humans more readily than ticks. Fleas can transmit tapeworms and roundworms to your pets and have been known to carry diseases such as plague, murine typhus and tularemia.

Life Cycle of a Flea

The average lifespan of an adult flea is approximately 6 weeks. It is important to understand the life cycle of fleas before trying to eradicate them. Their cycle is egg, larva, pupa and adult.

- **Eggs**: The eggs are laid on the host and fall off onto the ground in the yard, carpet, drapes, furniture and bedding.
- **Larvae**: After 3 to 5 days, the eggs hatch into maggot-like larvae. They feed on organic debris for approximately a week, and then make a cocoon.
- **Pupae**: The pupae then live out their lives in the carpet, furniture, bedding, drapes or yard for the next 3 to 6 weeks until hatching into adults.
- **Adults**: When the adults emerge, they immediately seek a host and mate. The fertilized eggs are laid and the cycle begins again.

*Note: Ideal conditions for fleas are 65°F to 80°F with 70% humidity. With these ideal conditions, one female can lay dozens of eggs per day. She is still able to lay eggs under less ideal conditions, but she lays fewer. It is thought that a female flea can lay an average of 20 to 30 eggs per day, or 620 to 930 eggs per month.*

Solutions for Fleas on Your Dog or Cat

You can eliminate fleas with a good pest-control regimen and daily inspections of your dog or cat during your daily quiet time with your pet. Their have been many advances in flea control, and there are many ways to control these pesky critters – both indoors and out.

- **Topical ointment**: Applied on the back of the neck for both cats and dogs. The amount used is determined by age and weight. Some ointments are waterproof, while others are not. For the most part, the ointments remain effective for 30 days. Most require a prescription from a veterinarian.
- **Dip**: Dips will work well for dogs and remain effective for approximately 30 days. The dog must be totally saturated, including his head area. To keep the dip out of the dog's eyes, you can put a drop of mineral oil or ophthalmic ointment in each eye before dipping. You can also sponge the dip solution on your dog. Dip works best on clean dogs ... so bathe your dog prior to applying dip. *NEVER dip a cat! If your cat needs to be dipped for any parasite, let your veterinarian do it.*
- **Flea Collars**: Collars should be changed every month and should be closely monitored on cats—especially if they are indoor/outdoor cats.
- **Shampoos**: Flea shampoos kill only on the fleas that are on the host. Use CAUTION when bathing a cat. Be careful not to get the shampoo in your pet’s eyes.
- **Powders**: Powders work but are difficult to apply evenly and effectively. They are also very dusty.
• **Natural Remedies:** There are some natural products that claim to work effectively. Many of them are not 100% proven but if used within the specified instructions could prove to be useful in the fight against fleas.

• **Daily Checks:** This is critical; you must check your pets daily. Make it part of your daily petting and interaction routine. Fleas prefer the neck, shoulders, underarms, stomach, head and rear areas of your pet. If you do find fleas, immediately start procedures to eradicate them from your cat or dog and then continue with total treatment of indoors and outdoors.

  **Important Reminder:** You cannot treat cats or kittens with the same kind of remedies that you would treat a dog. Use products that are specified safe for cats and kittens!

  It is important that you do not apply any of these on puppies or kittens younger than six weeks of age (read the label for any age, species or health limits). Be careful not to “over-kill”. All of these products contain toxins that, if used inappropriately or in addition to another tick or flea product could cause harm or death to your dog or cat.

### Solutions for Fleas in Your House

It is essential that you commit to all-out warfare on fleas. They breed so rapidly that your household and pets can become quickly infested.

• **Vacuum:** Treat your carpets with powders specially designed for flea control.

• **Fog:** Be sure to purchase foggers that contain IGR’s (Insect Growth Regulator); they interrupt the development stages of the larvae and pupae so that you can kill them in all the stages of development. Follow the directions to the letter; foggers are toxic to fish, birds and other small house pets.

• **Spray:** Spraying should still be done in addition to fogging. Use it where the fogger can’t reach and where there is heavy pet traffic. Spraying inside on a regular basis even through the winter months is good preventive maintenance.

• **Powders and granules:** Powders and granules work well around perimeters, both inside and outside. They should be used in conjunction with preventive spraying. Keep out of reach and or accessibility of children and other house pets.

### Solutions for Fleas in Your Yard

Killing fleas outdoors is equally important. It is imperative that you eliminate all sources of infestation. Try to determine the current cycle of the fleas. Indoor fleas may be in a different cycle from the outdoor fleas.

• **Yard maintenance:** It is essential that you keep your yard well mowed, maintained and free of unnecessary debris where fleas can hide.

• **Sprays:** Thorough spraying and saturation of the entire yard is essential. Don’t forget to spray the perimeter walls and fences. Sprays should also be done on a routine basis.

• **Powders and granules:** Powders and granules are effective in garden areas and around the perimeters and thresholds. Avoid areas where your pets and children could track through these products.

You can do all of these yourself; the most important thing to remember is to follow all of the instructions as written by the manufacturer. Be diligent and you will be able to control the fleas.

**Note:** Oftentimes your neighbors will be battling the same problem. If you can, try to get them to treat at the same time, otherwise you may just be swapping fleas from yard to yard and pet to pet.

For more information, please visit  
[www.azhumane.org](http://www.azhumane.org)

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado  
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