

How Much Do You Know About Fleas & Ticks?

Take our quiz to find out.

By Andrea Vardaro Tucker, ELS

Taking your pet for regular wellness visits, checking for fleas and ticks at home, and using vet-recommended parasite prevention are the best ways to avoid infestations. Quiz yourself to make sure you know how to help keep your pet—and home—pest free.

True or False?

Question 1:

Pets only need flea and tick preventives in the summer.

Question 2:

Fleas won't infest a clean house.

Question 3:

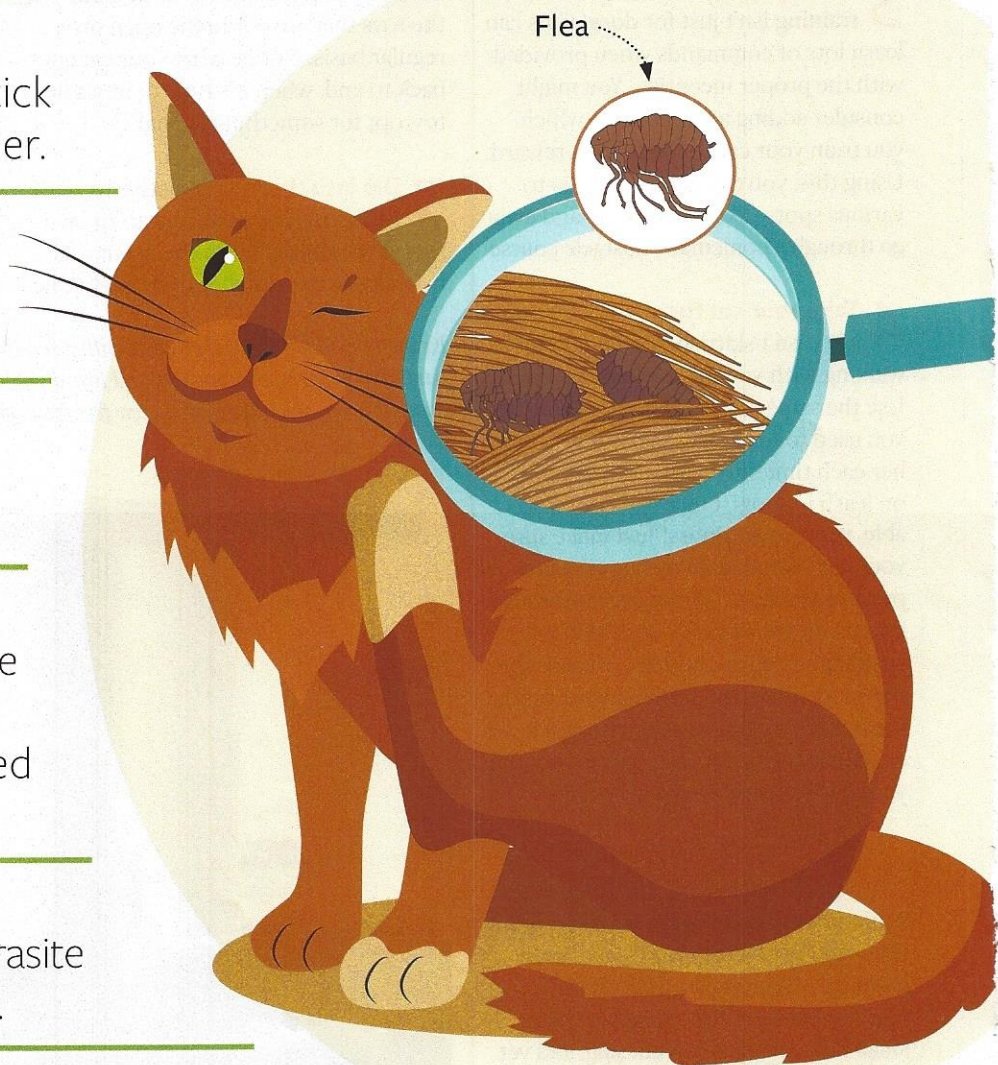
Scratching is a telltale sign a pet has fleas.

Question 4:

Even though they remove ticks while grooming themselves, cats still need a tick preventive.

Question 5:

The best place to find parasite removal advice is online.



Start by putting tasty, low-calorie treats in the puzzle to make sure your cat is interested in using it. Over time, start replacing the treats with small portions of food. Depending on your cat's response, you may be able to gradually increase use of the puzzle. If she's not getting all of her food out of the puzzle each day, feed her the remainder in a bowl. What if kitty's just not interested in puzzles? Try creating a scavenger hunt with normal bowls scattered throughout your home to encourage exploration.

3 Teach your cat new tricks. Clicker training isn't just for dogs! Cats can learn lots of commands when provided with the proper incentive. You might consider adding a target stick, which you train your cat to touch for a reward. Using this, you can train her to go to various spots (like her carrier) and even go through a homemade obstacle course!

4 Take your cat for a walk. If your kitty isn't skittish, she might enjoy walking with you outside on a harness. Use the same reward-based training you used to teach her tricks, rewarding her each time she takes a step or two on leash indoors. Once she's comfortable, venture outdoors! Just make sure your cat's up-to-date on her parasite preventives first. (These preventives are important for all cats—see the articles starting on pages 2 and 10 to learn why.) For more advice on walking your cat on leash, talk to your vet, and check out the articles at Vetstreet.com (enter "walking your cat on leash" in the search bar).

5 Explore different types of play. Not all cats love the same toys, and sometimes tastes change with age. Some toys, like those on a wand, encourage jumping (which can be difficult for older or heavier cats), while toys like small balls are made for chasing, and yet

others are designed to promote kicking or pouncing. If your kitty isn't into athletic movements, encourage her to bat at a feather toy without running and leaping—this will enable her to use her muscles with less stress on potentially achy joints. Is your cat always losing her toys? Toss a ball into a dry bathtub for some hockey-esque action (if desired, add a rubber mat to give your cat better traction and help protect your tub).

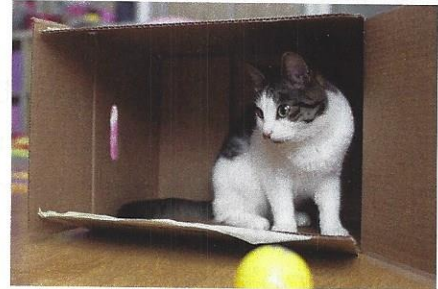
6 Change up the toys available to your cat. You don't have to go out and buy all new toys, but switch out the toys that are out in the open on a regular basis. Notice what your cat goes back to and, when it's time to buy a new toy, opt for something similar.

7 Dip into the 'nip. Whether you use catnip toys or sprinkle catnip on a surface you'd like her to check out (like her cat tree or scratcher), you might find

it's just what's needed to convince your cat that the added activity is worthwhile.

8 Give her additional opportunities to play. When you get a box in the mail or bring home a paper bag from the store, leave it out for your cat to explore. Make the box or bag more appealing by tossing in a toy or sprinkling some catnip in it.

Pay attention to what your cat responds to, get creative, and be ready to watch your feline's fitness flourish!



Kristen Seymour shares her office with a small gray cat named Trixie, who happens to be partial to horizontal scratchers and toys designed to be pounced upon and kicked—usually around 4 AM, and always just a few feet from where Kristen is trying to sleep.



*Association for Pet Obesity Prevention. 2016 survey results. petobesityprevention.org/2016. Accessed January 5, 2018.

Answers

Answer 1: False

Dogs and cats need regular treatment with effective flea and tick control products to help prevent infestations—for many pets, that means year-round. Fleas and ticks may be less noticeable during cooler seasons, but they can find shelter and reproduce, resurfacing once the conditions are right. For fleas, this may not take long if they've decided to shelter in your warm house. For ticks, areas like crawl spaces under your home, leaf/brush piles, and animal dens are often attractive hideouts. Milder winter weather can also mean that ticks become (or stay) active, and any time you walk through wooded areas with your dog, he's at risk for picking up ticks.

Answer 2: False

Fleas don't care how thoroughly or often you clean; once in your house, they'll multiply faster than any human can possibly clean, at a rate of 40 to 50 eggs a day, which equates to hundreds to thousands of eggs *per flea* within just weeks to months. And while you're busy cleaning your house, if your pets aren't treated with an effective preventive product, they're going to be hosting the mature fleas. Note that cleaning regularly—for instance, vacuuming, steam cleaning, and washing bedding—can help remove flea eggs and larvae as part of a comprehensive parasite preventive strategy. But preventive products for your pet definitely need to be part of that plan.

Answer 3: True and False

Yes, the most common reaction to flea infestation is scratching or chewing, but don't breathe a sigh of relief just because Fido or Fluffy doesn't seem to be itchy. Not all pets react this way, so scratching isn't the *only* sign to look out for; in fact, some infestations can be entirely asymptomatic (with the pet not showing any clinical signs) or lead to an invisible illness (such as bartonellosis or tapeworms) taking hold beneath your pet's skin.



Answer 4: True

Cats certainly may remove ticks with some thorough licking, but they can't reach every spot of their bodies. If just one tick latches on, your cat could become seriously ill, including getting a life-threatening disease called cytauxzoonosis. What's more, if too many ticks infest your cat, she could become anemic from blood loss.

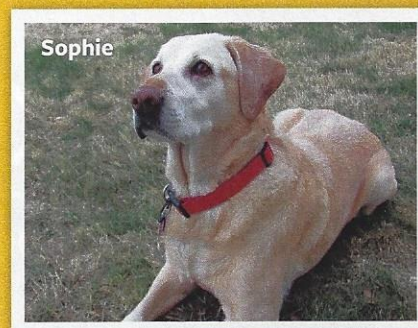
Answer 5: False

Your veterinarian is your best source for tips on preventing and removing parasites. So much bad advice has spread through social media and the internet in general, however, that some points are worth addressing directly. Never attempt the following internet tips, which could endanger you or your pet:

- Pinching/pulling off ticks with your fingers
- Using a match to burn off ticks
- Drowning ticks with nail polish or petroleum jelly
- Adding garlic to your pet's food to control fleas
- Applying undiluted essential oils to your dog or cat

And ignore online advice about not removing ticks with tweezers; *tweezers or other vet-recommended tick-removal devices are safe and effective means of removal*. Ask your veterinarian to demonstrate proper use.

VET SPOTLIGHT



Dr. Tracy L. Taullie

Ark Valley Animal Hospital, La Junta, CO

Thanks to Ruth Taylor from La Junta for submitting this heartwarming story:

"A compassionate veterinarian is an important part of family pet care, and Dr. Tracy Taullie is that kind of vet. She has seen us through consistent pet care from puppy to adult as well as caring for 3 litters of puppies over the years.

Most recently, we brought in our 12-year-old yellow Labrador, Sophie, for general health concerns. Dr. Taullie did her usual overall examination and immediately expressed concern as she found a mass, which was confirmed by x-ray. With wisdom, honesty, and a great measure of compassion, she gave her recommendations on testing options and potential treatment. As always, her personal understanding of our family and our pet gave us the courage to face what was ahead.

One week later, we found ourselves waiting anxiously while Sophie underwent exploratory surgery. Dr. Taullie's staff regularly gave updates and ultimately the good news that the mass could be removed and appeared to be contained. Dr. Taullie's concern and care for Sophie extended to having her stay overnight to allow more time for rest following surgery for our older dog.

Our relief and gratitude went beyond words as we moved from possible pet loss to the joy of bringing her home. Three days later, on a Friday evening at 7 PM, Dr. Taullie personally called to inform us that the biopsy results were in. She wanted to let us know before the weekend that the results were the best we could have hoped for.

Dr. Taullie has always demonstrated thorough care and personal interest in the lives of our pets. Whether the news is difficult and tearful or pleasant and routine, the care and compassion Dr. Taullie shows is what makes her a fabulous family veterinarian."

To share your story, see the inside back cover (after the Cute Pet Contest).