

Does Your Pet Have Ear Mites?

Health Alert!

If your cat or dog seems to be constantly shaking its head and scratching at its ears, the cause may be a parasite called ear mites. These are very tiny creatures-about the size of the end of a pin-that are almost impossible to see without some magnification. They may be small, but each of their eight legs has lots of tiny, spiny protrusions that cause intense itching as they move around in the ear canal of your pet. They live off skin flakes and ear wax and reproduce rapidly. The inflammation that they cause results in more wax, which leads to a self-sustaining cycle for the ear mite and incredible discomfort for your pet. In addition to the intense itching, another hallmark sign of an ear mite infestation is a large amount of dark brown wax in the ears. Some people describe it as looking like coffee grounds. If you look very closely or use a magnifying glass, you actually can see the mites as tiny white dots moving around on the dark wax.

Take Immediate Action

It is important to treat the problem quickly as secondary ear infections often result. If your pet shakes or scratches his ears violently enough to break blood vessels in his ear flap, he can end up with an ear hematoma that requires surgery to correct. There are a number of topically applied anti-parasite products that

claim to treat ear mites. The truth is that although these products do kill ear mites, one or even two topical applications will not fully clear up the problem. I have treated many patients that came to my office with chronic recurring ear mite infestations that their owners had been treating for several months; many were under the care of a veterinarian.

Getting to the Core of the Problem

Before I divulge my three-step process for eliminating ear mites once and for all, I want to mention the importance of treating the environment, as well. Ear mites get into pets' ears when they lay down and contact an area where there are mites that will crawl into their ear canals. This can happen outside initially, but once your pet has ear mites, they can be in your carpet, on your couch or anywhere your pet has laid his head. When your pet shakes its head, it also can send chunks of wax and mites flying out that land somewhere in your home. Mites do not travel very far on their own -we are talking inches to a foot, at most. They also are easily killed by the same pesticides that kill fleas in a home or yard. Therefore, it is a good idea not only to have your yard and/or patio deck and lanai treated, but also your home, or at least the areas where your pet rests his head. This will prevent re-infestation of your pets' ears after he has been treated. I have had 100 percent success in treating ear mites by using the following steps.

First, I flush out and clean the pet's ears thoroughly. I myself or my technicians can do this far better than a pet owner can at home, because we have the tools and the knowledge to get all the way down the L-shaped ear canal and remove all the wax and debris. This removes many

mites, but more importantly, removes the wax that they feed on and might even burrow into to avoid the medicine that will kill them. My second step is to instill a medicine directly into the ear canal to kill all mites instantly instead of waiting for a topical medicine to, perhaps, make it there, either in skin oils or through the bloodstream. This way I know that I have exterminated all mites immediately.

Next, any mite eggs that may hatch must also be addressed. I, once again, want this to happen directly, so my third step is to have the pet owner put drops in the pet's ears once a day for the next three weeks. This time span more than covers the life cycle of any eggs that were present initially from hatching, and they never get a chance to survive to cause a problem, because we treat the ears each day. If you think your dog or cat has ear mites, contact your veterinarian immediately to end his suffering and prevent the development of an ear hematoma that could require surgery.