

8 Facts to Fight Fleas and Ticks

Arm yourself to keep your dog pest-free.

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5. It might be more than itching. Fleas cause many skin problems. More seriously, they can lead to grave medical problems, such as tapeworms or flea-allergy dermatitis, and even anemia, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association of Schaumburg, Ill.

6. Toxicity has declined. A little over a decade ago, "consumers had to choose between [products] that were mildly toxic to greatly toxic," says Philip Kass, DVM, associate professor of epidemiology at the University of California's School of Veterinary Medicine in Davis. "Today, the products are incredibly safe."

7. The newer adulticides, generally topicals applied between the dog's shoulder blades, last about a month. Because they spread over the skin, they are considered less toxic and safer than products absorbed into the bloodstream. The safest insect-growth regulators don't kill adult fleas, but they are good for use on carpets, bedding, and yards. Use them sparingly, though; fleas can develop immunity to regulators, Kass says.

8. Chemicals do the work. Some doctors advocate holistic flea-and-tick-fighting methods, such as diet change, herbs, and regular exercise to build stamina and strength. But a variety of over-the-counter and prescription products kill fleas and ticks and prevent flea reproduction. Talk with your veterinarian before giving your dog any medication.

Contributing Editor Arden Moore contributed to this report.