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DOES YOUR DOG STILL HAVE AN ITCH TO SCRATCH?

If you have an itchy dog you've probably got an unhappy dog, or at least an uncomfortable dog. No doubt you're also desperate to find the cause so you can stop your dog constantly scratching. There are many reasons why dog's itch, but did you know the time of year that they itch can be a clue to the reason why?

It's not only seasonal allergies where changes in the weather, causes changes in your dog's skin. For example, a dog that starts to get itchy in springtime may well be suffering from allergies.

It may not always be easy to figure out why your dog is itchy, but I bet you know when it starts.

For dogs that itch because of parasites or allergies, the four most common triggers include:

- Fleas
- Food
- Environmental allergens (e.g. pollen, mould, grasses and dust mites)
- Skin contact with allergens (e.g. carpet deodorants, shampoos and insecticidal products)

Here are some clues that your dog may need medical treatment:

- Excessive licking, chewing, biting or scratching
- Excessive rolling, rubbing or scooting
- Foot chewing
- Hair loss
- Recurrent ear problems

Determining which condition your dog is dealing with requires a vet's evaluation. The most appropriate treatment plan can then be implemented.



HOW COMMON IS HEARTWORM IN AUSTRALIA?

Heartworm is a parasitic worm that lodges in the heart and vessels. It is easy to prevent but difficult to treat. How common is it and is your pet really at risk?

The simple answer is YES, your pet is definitely at risk of heartworm if it is not up to date with its parasite treatments.

Heartworm is certainly less common than it has been in the past, however we are far from eradicating this dangerous disease. For anyone who has seen the picture of the heart full of worms in their vet's office, it is pretty clear why it's called heartworm. Unfortunately, heartworm infected dogs don't tend to show obvious signs until they start coughing up blood or suddenly die, so early detection and prevention are our key strategies for keeping pets safe.

How is heartworm spread?

Heartworm is spread by mosquitoes, so even indoor dogs that don't mix with other dogs can get heartworm. For the disease to be spread, a mosquito must bite a heartworm positive dog and then bite your dog, which is why having all pets on heartworm prevention greatly reduces the spread of the disease.

Can other species get heartworm?

Luckily humans can't get heartworm, but cats, ferrets, foxes and dingoes all easily pick up heartworm from mosquitoes too. For cats, just one heartworm tends to be fatal. For foxes and dingoes living on the fringes of urban areas, their heartworms act as a reservoir for the disease, which is why we will never entirely get rid of it.

How do I know if my pet has heartworm?

If you have had a break of more than 3 months in your heartworm prevention, ask your vet for a simple heartworm test. Dogs with heartworm tend to cough and lose weight gradually, but only when the heart damage is irreversible. Back when heartworm was common, sudden death or coughing up blood were often the only indicators the dog was suffering.

How common is heartworm?

A study in shelter dogs from NSW, QLD and SA in 2009 found a prevalence of between 0-2.2% infection rate in this population of dogs. Warm weather, humidity and floods will increase mosquito populations and encourage the spread of heartworm. It is thought that heartworm infestation rates in stray dogs, dingoes and foxes are higher than 2%. Since there are often large populations of untreated animals that live on the fringes of urban areas, they act as a reservoir for the infection. Mosquitoes, depending on the species (there are over 400 species in Australasia!) can travel for up to 50km, so although heartworm is rare, mosquitoes are not!

So should I use heartworm prevention?

Yearly heartworm injections or a monthly preventative like NexGard Spectra or Panoramis are the best way to prevent heartworm infection. These are incredibly cheap and safe treatments, so are recommended year-round in Australia. The disease is costly to treat and usually fatal by the time it's diagnosed so prevention is MUCH better than cure.

What if my pet has never had a heartworm preventative?

Visit your vet for a heartworm test first. Pets with established heartworm disease can have an acute anaphylactic reaction to a treatment if they happen to already have the disease. Although this is incredibly rare, it is a pretty cheap test to do and if heartworm is diagnosed at this early stage, the treatment is much safer than if heart damage has already occurred.

So what next?

If you own a cat, dog or ferret and are not sure about whether your heartworm treatment is up to date, pop into your local Vet Clinic and they can check any treatments you are giving and do a heartworm test if required.

Source: <https://www.lovethatpet.com.au/blog/health-and-wellbeing/how-common-is-heartworm-in-australia/>

FLEAS – AN ITCH OR SCRATCH – SOLVING A FLEA PROBLEM

Fleas love summer – humidity and warmer temperatures create the perfect setting for fleas to flourish – and trigger an outbreak in your home.

The adult fleas you can see on your pet represent only 5% of the total flea population. The other 95% lurk in the pet's home environment as eggs, larvae and pupae, waiting for the right conditions before they hatch and wreak havoc.

Although they may not be visible, fleas lay up to 50 eggs a day. These eggs are shed from your pet into the home environment. Eggs hatch into larvae which can end up hiding in your carpet, rugs, couch or cracks in the floorboards. Larvae then develop into pupae which lurk in the home environment, waiting for the presence of a host (you or your pets) to prompt them to emerge as adult fleas and start feeding.

Without prevention, your home may be at risk of a flea infestation, and it may be from causes beyond your control. Fleas thrive in damp, shady areas found in your garden and especially under your house. Their eggs can be shed from neighbourhood pets, rodents or native animals that have access to your garden or home.

To prevent your home becoming a summer breeding ground for fleas, it's crucial to treat your pets monthly during the summer season – and all through the year. Missing just one monthly treatment can quickly lead to a re-infestation.

Source: <https://justforpets.com.au/>

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Maintaining parasite protection can seem complex.

Different products, different timings and different methods of administration can be confusing for even the most experienced pet owners, leading to poor compliance and even avoiding parasite protection products entirely.

BUT NOW, THE ONE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR IS HERE!

NexGard SPECTRA® for dogs. The **MOST** complete protection against fleas, ticks, heartworm and intestinal worms, in a monthly tasty chew!

NexGard SPECTRA is now available at all leading vets and specialty pet retailers. It is a combination product with two proven and familiar active ingredients which both kill fleas and ticks, including the deadly paralysis tick, treats and controls intestinal worms (roundworm, hookworm and whipworm) and prevents heartworm disease.

Together, these two active ingredients provide Australian dog owners the **MOST** complete protection against fleas, ticks, heartworm and intestinal worms, in one, monthly tasty chew.

- Suitable for puppies from 8 weeks of age
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ARE PETS REALLY PART OF THE FAMILY?



In today's society, pets are increasingly viewed as part of the family; more than 80% of pet owners consider their pets as family members and some feel closest to their pet. In a U.S. national survey, 57% of respondents, if stranded on a desert island with only one companion, would choose their family pet.

As far back as 1984, research uncovered the important role of pets within families, with 80% of U.S. pet owners indicating they received more companionship from their animals than from friends and neighbours, and viewed their pets as equally important as family members and relations. Children also acknowledge a special relationship with the family pet, describing pets as 'members of the family', and often referring to them as their 'best friends'. Many children turn to their pets for support and comfort, with one study finding that 75% of participating 10-14 year olds sought out their pets when they were upset. In another UK study, children often ranked pets higher than certain human relationships within their social networks and viewed dogs and cats as confidantes, as well as providers of comfort and support.

Our relationship with pets, dogs in particular goes back to the beginnings of humanity. Our ability to communicate with dogs has developed over

I = MY
Pet!

I = MY
Pet!

the past 14,000 years and dogs have adapted accordingly, evolving to recognize and respond to human facial expressions and signals in a way that no other species can. There are recent studies that show that oxytocin levels in humans increase as owners stare into their pet's eyes, which could account for feelings of love we feel towards our pets.

Much of the 'research' reported in the media is the result of surveys of users of particular pet services, so can't be relied on to be scientifically rigorous. For example, a U.S. pet box company surveyed 1000 customers in 2015 and reported that 38% of dog owners love their dog more than their spouse. In 2013, a UK animal welfare charity, the Brooke Fund, surveyed 2000 women and reported that 10% claimed they loved their pet more than their partner, with nearly one-third reporting equal affection for both. The UK press reported a study by pet website tails.com as finding that 41% of UK dog owners talk to their pet more than their partner.



So, are pets part of the family?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines a family as "two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de-facto), adoption, step or fostering and who are usually resident in the same household." Pets might be included under adoption under this definition.

The important role pets play in families is well-supported by the research literature, although there remain significant research gaps and difficulties.

Many studies relating to pets as family do not take into account or control for variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic status or the number of children or pets.

Studies have also shown that pet lovers very rarely replace humans with animals in their relationships, but rather generalize their capacity to love, empathy and compassion to all species. Pets are now so well-accepted as part of their families that they are being included in individual, couples and family therapy techniques.

As our families become smaller, are we replacing children with pets? Many young couples are putting off having children and are instead opting for a pet. The attachment is intense and they learn a great deal about loving and caring for something other than themselves. For parents, the pet is either treated like a first child or the relationship with the pet changes as the owner becomes more pragmatic and less attached when the responsibilities associated with parenthood take over. The pet can become a substitute child for empty nesters and also a catalyst for meeting people, while for the elderly, pets are essential companions and can become something to get up and stay active for.

As veterinarians, we are aware of the role pets play in their human families and understand the importance of the pet-owner relationship and that the value the pet will be difference for all clients.

Source: Australian Veterinary Journal, Vol. 95, No. 5 May 2017

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