

May

Case of the Month

Molly, a 4 year old long haired, black cat, presented to the hospital for hair loss along her back and rear legs. She is an indoor only cat that lives in the same house as a Cocker Spaniel. She had been scratching for over one month and pulling out her hair.



Molly had many red bumps along her back and tail base. Her hair loss was symmetrical, creating a "mohawk" along her back. She was searched for fleas or "flea dirt" (brown/black flecks on the hair and skin). She was physically normal on examination.

Photo courtesy www.utk.edu

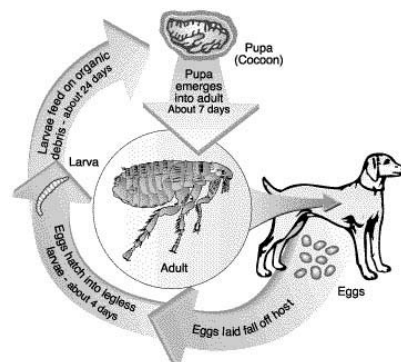
A few fleas were found on Molly's belly confirming a flea allergy. Her pattern of hair loss is typical of a flea allergy. Dogs and cats may also present with only a small amount of hair loss in the middle of their back or on their legs.

Flea allergy dermatitis is one of the most common skin conditions affecting cats and dogs. When a flea bites the animal, the body has an intense hypersensitivity reaction to the saliva of the flea. This reaction causes the animal to become very itchy which can then lead to reddened skin, hair loss and secondary infection. Animals do not have to be infested with fleas; it only takes **ONE** flea to cause this reaction.



The best way to prevent flea allergy dermatitis is to keep your pet on a quality flea control product such as Advantage, Frontline, Revolution or Promeris. These are topical medications applied monthly for continuous prevention. Products obtained over the counter are not as reliable for adequate flea control.

Many owners believe a product is not working because their pet may still have fleas after a product is used. Understanding the life cycle of the flea can help this misconception. Adult fleas lay eggs on the dog or cat and those eggs fall off the animal. Eggs then hatch into larvae which can lay dormant for months. This is the **hardest stage** of the flea to kill. The larvae become encased in a cocoon before emerging as an adult. Flea products will kill eggs and adult fleas, but cannot kill the larval stage. Because the larvae can live in the carpet or bedding for months, live fleas can be hatched out at any time. This



makes applying a flea control product monthly very important as it will help kill newly hatching fleas. As new fleas emerge, it can appear that the flea product isn't working. Environmental control is equally as important; this includes vacuuming and cleaning any area where your pet lays and in some cases, flea foggers.

It is crucial for all animals in a household to be treated for fleas. In our case, Molly stayed indoors continuously but she had a canine friend in the house. Because the dog goes outdoors, he can bring fleas back into the indoor environment to bite Molly. While the dog may not be allergic to the flea bite, Molly clearly is.

Treatment for flea allergy dermatitis includes starting your pet on a flea medication that is appropriate for your situation and steroids to help the inflammation and itch. Many animals require antibiotics to treat secondary skin infections.

Advantage was applied to Molly and she was given an injection of a short acting steroid. The owners were instructed to vacuum thoroughly, dispose of the bag outside immediately and to wash and dry all of her bedding. Their dog was already being given monthly topical flea prevention but it was made clear that both pets needed to be treated regularly to prevent recurrence. Because Molly is so sensitive to the flea bite and because the immature flea can lay dormant for long periods of time, the owners were advised to apply flea prevention year long.

Please contact us if you have any questions!!!