



The Orange County Register

New weapons in flea wars

A veterinarian weighs in on the best options for cat owners.

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SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

It's summer and those pesky fleas are out in full force. Even indoor-only cats get fleas. Fleas can hitchhike on humans and come in through screens or open windows.

Fleas live off the blood of your cat or dog, so if you are getting flea bites, your home is infested with desperately hungry insects.

Fortunately there have been great advances in products that kill fleas and are safe for our furry feline friends. You no longer have to use collars, sprays, powders or dips. These products are obsolete and much more toxic to you and your cat than newer options.

Cats are very sensitive to drugs and insecticides — younger kittens even more so — so it is crucial to read labels and never use products labeled for dogs on cats. Many dog products are potentially lethal to cats.

All-natural flea-repelling products have not been proven very effective either. In fact, some natural remedies are also toxic to cats. Please be wary and research any of these products before trying them.

As a veterinarian, I feel comfortable recommending the products that have been researched and have either FDA or EPA approval for use on cats. The manufacturers have spent time and money to ensure their products are safe.

Newer products for flea control are not cheap, but they are worth the money. Buying them from online or



Dr. Elaine Wexler-Mitchell is a feline practice specialist in Orange County. She joins the Register's community of pet experts and plans to write about news, health, technology and treatments for cats with help from other veterinarians in her practice. In her words, she "wants to help cat fanatics and newer cat owners provide great care for their pets." She owns two Somali cats: Keiki, left, and Shaka.

nonveterinary sources can be risky, as you could be buying an illegal copy with a questionable formula. Consider asking your vet about promotions that might include extra vials of the product.

One of my favorite flea control products is a flea comb. You can use one to monitor your cat for fleas. A wire-toothed flea comb with a handle is the easiest type to use.

However, unless you comb your cat several times daily, or have an indoor cat that never gets fleas, a flea comb alone will not be adequate for complete flea control. Here are some suggestions:

• **Spot-on treatments:** Monthly veterinary-supplied, spot-on products offer excellent flea control. They include Advantage, Frontline, Revolution, ProMeris and Vectra. Each contain a different chemical that will kill fleas within several hours, but none of these products repels fleas.

• **Be patient:** Spot-on treatments take time to work. The chemicals work by damaging the flea's nervous system. Some of these products are similar to

those used in agriculture to protect the fruits and vegetables that we eat.

• **Oral products:** Capstar will kill fleas most quickly, but it only lasts for 24 hours. It is safe enough to give frequently and is sometimes used by owners whose cats have reactions to topical products. Some veterinarians are using another oral product called Comfortis with cats, but it is not licensed for use in cats, so you must be willing to assume an off-label risk.

• **Sterilization:** Program comes as tablets, oral gel and injection. Program does not kill adult fleas, but it will sterilize any fleas that are exposed so they will not reproduce and keep up an infestation.

There are so many effective and safe products available that there is no excuse for your cat to have fleas. Fleas are a nuisance and are uncomfortable for your cat, and overwhelming infestations can cause life-threatening anemia. Fleas also transmit other diseases and tapeworms. Discuss a flea control plan with your veterinarian and keep your cat healthy.