

Pets with Dr. Jyl

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[FIGHTING FLEAS \(4/24/02\)](#)

Fleas are more than just an itchy nuisance - they can cause serious health problems for our pets and ourselves. Fleas can spread tapeworm. Dogs may also be allergic to flea bites and get a skin condition called flea bite dermatitis.

Dr. Jyl's first choice for flea and tick prevention is "Frontline." If your interested in learning more about Frontline, or purchasing it for your pet, call Dr. Jyl.

There's no shortage of flea control products on the market - foggers, shampoos, collars and dips, plus the latest "spot" treatments. But many of these contain dangerous chemicals like organochlorines, organophosphates and carbamates. These chemicals in large doses can cause breathing problems, tremors, vomiting, skin irritations, permanent nerve damage and death. Some dogs experience hair loss and sores around the neck from flea collars, plus the chemical fumes given off by the collars can negatively affect everyone in the house. The drug in the anti-flea pill Program (lufenuron) can concentrate in breast milk, which may cause lethargy, diarrhea and respiratory problems in puppies.



If you're interested in adopting Chili, call Caped Dog Rescue at (916) 737-2128.

Unfortunately fleas reproduce so quickly, those that survive the chemical barrage have developed resistance to insecticides. We haven't reduced the flea population so much as built a better flea. In response, flea products have become increasingly complicated. For example, the new monthly "preventatives" like ProSpot are placed on the skin and absorbed into your dog's blood. When fleas bite your dog, they ingest the insecticide in the blood and die. Unfortunately, this means your dog has a steady stream of poison in her blood, and the fleas all have to bite her before the product works.

Luckily, rather than surrounding your dog with a cloud of chemicals, you can choose from a multitude of remedies that are simpler and safer to use.



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Flea-Fighting Foods: Pests and parasites are attracted to dogs that are already weakened by disease or chronic illness. A robust, healthy dog is just not appetizing to bloodsucking critters. The biggest key to flea prevention - and to your dog's overall health - is good nutrition. A healthy diet of fresh foods will do a lot to keep pests away. During flea season, you may want to add nutritional supplements to better keep pests at bay. One commonly touted flea repellent is brewer's yeast, which is rich in B-vitamins, but there are conflicting reports on its effectiveness. Brewer's yeast is a by-product of the brewing industry, and is generally considered not to be of very high quality. Some vets suggest using nutritional yeast instead, and only during flea season, not year-round. However, many dogs are allergic to yeast products. If your dog reacts poorly to yeast, stop using it. Make sure your dog gets enough B Vitamins from other sources, like organ meats, sardines and cottage cheese. Garlic, on the other hand, is almost

universally accepted as good natural flea prevention. Add fresh minced garlic to your dog's meals, 1/4 clove to two cloves daily, depending on the weight of your dog. Start slowly - some dogs can be sensitive to garlic, leading to flatulence and diarrhea. You may also use high-potency garlic tablets.

Herbal Help: Some recommend making a flea and tick repellent powder from equal parts of the following dried herbs (or as many of these as you can find): rue, wormwood, eucalyptus, rosemary, fennel and yellow dock. Mix the herbs together in a shaker-top jar, and apply sparingly to your pooch, making sure to get at the base of the hairs along the back, neck and belly.

Essential Oils: Plants produce essential oils as their own survival technique to repel bugs. This makes essential oils great pest repellents for animals and humans, too. The oils used should be dilute (not full-strength or "neat"). You can squirt a few drops on braided cotton or twine for a "rechargeable" collar. Essential oils are also available in shampoos, sprays and soaps. Application will have to be done more often than once-a-month flea drops, because the scents will fade. Keep in mind, just because something is "100 percent natural" doesn't mean it's safe. Pennyroyal oil is a component of many natural flea and tick products, but pennyroyal oil (a highly concentrated form of the herb) contains neurotoxic ketones and liver-damaging hepatoxins that can lead to death or cause pregnant dogs to abort. Pennyroyal is inexpensive to produce in mass quantities, which is why it may be so popular in flea control products. There are many essential oils that are not as strong as pennyroyal, but work just as well to repel fleas and ticks. Some flea sprays and treatments contain peppermint, clary sage, citronella and lemon.