

# All About Pets

*The national pet care information service*



## SKIN AND EAR CARE IN CATS



THE BLUE CROSS

*Britain's pet charity*

*Signs that your cat has ear problems include frequent shaking of the head, or scratching at the ear region.*

*Discharge may be visible within the ear – this is often black or dark brown and may look like dried blood, but it can also be creamy coloured. There may be an unpleasant smell.*



## Could it be canker?

Canker is a general term meaning 'ear irritation'. Ear mites are a frequent cause of irritation, especially in kittens. They are tiny creatures just visible to the naked eye, which live deep in the ear canal. Your vet may see them with an auroscope, but if there is a lot of wax they may not be detectable. All cats with ear problems should be treated for mites, using medication from the vet – either eardrops or a special 'spot on' that is applied over the shoulder blades. In-contact cats in the household also need treatment, even if their ears appear unaffected.

Sometimes, following long-term irritation to the ear, cats develop a cauliflower-like thickening of the external ear canal. This needs frequent cleaning to prevent irritation from wax build-up and can be a lifelong problem. You can get a suitable ear-cleaning product from the vet. Your vet will also check your pet for 'polyps' – fleshy growths, often on a stalk, which attach deep in the ear. They are usually benign, but occasionally malignant cancers occur. They obstruct the normal ventilation and drainage of the ear, so should be surgically removed.

## I've heard that cats get sunburn?

Just as with people, sunlight can be dangerous to cats – particularly those with white or pale ears and noses. It's best to keep these pets indoors between 10am and 3pm on sunny days. You can use unscented waterproof sunblock of at least factor 15, but avoid products containing zinc or para-amino benzoic acid. Reapply the sunblock regularly. The first sign of problems is a pink colouration and scaliness, followed by crusting and scabbing of the affected area. Seek veterinary advice.

## My cat's ear has swollen up overnight...

A sudden swelling of the ear flap is likely to be a haematoma or blood blister. It occurs when a blood vessel ruptures, and bleeds into the ear flap, and is usually caused by the cat scratching. Although this bleed is gradually reabsorbed, the ear flap will scar and crumple into a cauliflower ear, which can obstruct the ear canal. Your vet may advise an operation which limits this deformity and will also look for the underlying reason for the itch.

## **My cat has little gritty bits in its coat – is it eczema?**

Eczema is simply a term meaning 'itchy skin'. In people it is commonly used to refer to allergic skin conditions. Cats do get allergic skin problems, often due to flea bites, but there can be other causes as well. The allergic reaction to flea bites sometimes causes scabs to form that give the coat a gritty feel.

## **I've never seen fleas on my cat!**

Many cats are allergic to flea bites and one or two bites may be enough to provoke quite a severe reaction. A cat will then often lick excessively to attack the itch, or will scratch, which will disturb the fleas and drive them off the skin. In any case, fleas only spend about a tenth of their time on the animal – they actually live in the environment. The only way to be sure that fleas do not cause your pet's skin irritation is to treat all animals in the household regularly with a product from the vet, and to treat the house as well.

## **My cat keeps licking itself – what can I do until I can take it to the vet?**

Licking doesn't heal – it produces more damage and discomfort. Use an Elizabethan or 'bucket' collar to prevent licking or cover sores on the trunk by putting a t-shirt on your pet. Soothe the skin by bathing with cold water or applying ice, followed by witch hazel or camomile lotion.



## **The vet says my cat may have a food allergy, but it's always been fed on this brand...**

An allergy happens because of a change in an animal's body. In daily life, many substances surround the body. Some of these, like viruses and bacteria, may be dangerous and an immune response occurs to prevent infection. Normally non-dangerous things are identified and ignored so that an unnecessary immune response doesn't happen. In allergies a flaw occurs in this process, and the body fails to recognise them properly. An immune response develops, causing itchy skin. So is possible for a cat to develop an allergy to food it has been happily eating for years.

## **My child has got ringworm – the doctor says it might be from our cat?**

Cats are not the only source of ringworm (which is actually a fungal infection) but in this situation the vet should check all animals in the household. Special tests are likely to be necessary so tell the vet what has happened. Pets do not necessarily show any signs of skin or hair problems – they can be silent carriers of the fungus.





## Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit [www.allaboutpets.org.uk](http://www.allaboutpets.org.uk), the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



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Registered charity no: 224392

Photography: John Henderson • Indusfoto