

What Are Ear Mites?



Ear mites are tiny infectious organisms resembling microscopic ticks. The mite can just barely be seen as a small white dot with the naked eye, but it usually must be detected by examination of a sample of ear wax under a microscope. Infection usually produces a characteristic dry black ear discharge commonly said to resemble coffee grounds. Because of the classical appearance of this discharge, infection is often diagnosed based on the presence of such discharge though without visual confirmation of the mite under the microscope, it is possible to be led astray. The discharge is composed of ear wax, blood, inflammatory biochemicals, and ear mites themselves.

The Bizarre Ear Mite Life Cycle

The mite lives on the surface of the ear canal skin, though sometimes migrates out onto the face and head of its host. Eggs are laid and hatch after 4 days of incubation. The larva hatches from the egg, feeds on ear wax and skin oils for about a week, and then molts into a protonymph, which in turn molts into a deutonymph. The deutonymph mates with the adult male. What seems especially bizarre to us mammals is that the deutonymph has not yet developed a gender at the time it mates with the adult male.

After mating, the deutonymph molts into either an adult male or an adult female. If she becomes a female, she will be gravid with eggs as a result of the mating. If he develops into a male, there are no consequences to the mating and he is ready to mate with deutonymphs of his own choosing. The adult mite lives approximately 2 months happily eating ear wax and skin oils. The life cycle (the time it takes for an egg to develop into an adult mite ready for parenthood) requires 3 weeks.

MOST ear mite cases are found in cats.

Dogs can be infected as well but since dogs more commonly get ear infections of other types, ear infections in dogs rarely involve mites.



How Did My Pet Get Ear Mites?

Ear mites readily transmit from host to host by physical contact. Ear mites came from some other animal with whom your pet has been socializing. Because mites are easily transmissible by physical contact, treatment for mites often must include all household pets.

What Harm Comes from Ear Mite Infection?

The presence of the mites is inflammatory and can generate very irritating ear infections. Skin disease can also result from infection by the ear mite.

Is This Contagious?

Ear mite infection is certainly contagious among cats and dogs. Typically, the victim is an outdoor cat. Humans have been reported to develop skin rashes rarely; in general, we may consider that a human pet owner is extremely unlikely to experience any symptoms when their pet is infected with ear mites.

How Do I Get Rid Of Ear Mites?

Topical Treatments: At Least 3 Weeks Usage

There are numerous products available for ear mite eradication. Most older and over-the-counter products contain insecticides that do not kill incubating mite eggs. Because of this limitation, such products must be used for at least the duration of the 21-day life cycle of the mite. Some specialists recommend a 30-day treatment course with such products.

Topical Treatments At Least 10 Days Usage

Tresaderm

Another approach involves the use of a topical ear product called Tresaderm® (manufactured by Merial) that contains an antibiotic for any secondary bacterial infections, a cortisone derivative for the inflammation, and thiabendazole to kill yeasts and mites. This is an excellent ear product and is able to kill the developing mite eggs. This cuts the treatment course down to 10 to 14 days and provides an excellent oily lubricant with which to clean the ears as well. This product has been favored by veterinarians for decades.





Injection: Two to Four Treatments

Ivomec

A newer treatment that is not FDA-approved involves the use of ivermectin, a powerful anti-parasite medication. Ivermectin is especially helpful for pets who will not allow direct treatment of their ears. Most ivermectin injectable protocols involve shots weekly or every 2 weeks. This is a highly effective method of ear mite eradication but there are some limitations. Certain breeds of dogs are sensitive to this medication and cannot take it. Certain individuals have similar sensitivities which cannot be predicted by breed. Injectable ivermectin is not approved for the treatment of ear mites in small animals.

See more detail on the use <http://www.VeterinaryPartner.com/Content.plx?P=A&A=518&S=<%=SpeciesID %>&EVetID=<%=EVetID %>ivermectin>.

Another product that has been popular is fipronil, the active ingredient in the flea control product *Frontline*. While Frontline is not helpful against ear mites when used on the skin as directed for fleas, it is effective when used topically in the ear. This use is also not sanctioned by the manufacturer and possible adverse effects from the product's use in this way have not been formally studied.

See general information on <http://www.vin.com/WebLink.plx?BT=0&URL=http://www.frontline.com> Frontline.

Single Use Products

Acarexx

There are currently several prescription products available that reliably eradicate an ear mite infection with one single use. Two such products are available for use directly in the infected ear: Acarexx, a topical version of ivermectin, and Milbemite, a topical version of milbemycin oxime, the same active ingredient as in the heartworm preventive Interceptor. These products are approved for cats only and are available only through veterinarians.

See more detail on <http://www.idexx.com/AnimalHealth/Pharmaceuticals/ACAREXX/index.cfm> Acarexx® from the manufacturer. and http://www.petwellness.com/cat_milbemite_home.asp Milbemite® from the manufacturer.





Another topical product now available against ear mites is Revolution® (selamectin). A single application is used on the skin, the product is absorbed into the body where it kills numerous other parasites and then returns to be concentrated in the skin. Revolution® is primarily a flea control product but is approved for both dogs and cats for the treatment of ear mite infection. Continuing use of Revolution® for flea control has the added benefit of preventing further ear mite infections (especially helpful for outdoor cats). It is important to realize that Revolution® is a prescription medication and cannot be obtained without proper veterinary evaluation.

Revolution for Cats

Further, while Revolution® use will kill the mites, ear cleaning is needed at the beginning of therapy (and possibly at the end) to remove the irritating wax and debris. Be sure to have the ears re-checked according to your vet's recommendations. Success will not be met unless the ear canal is thoroughly cleaned. This is true whether a topical solution or one the systemic products is used.

See general information on <http://www.revolutionpet.com/default.html> Revolution® from the manufacturer.



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What if They Just Don't Seem to Ever Go Away?



Occasionally, we receive messages regarding a case of ear mites for which "everything" has been used and the mites simply will not go away. In this situation consider the following tips: Was the mite infection confirmed initially? Remember, it is easy to be fooled by the presence of a discharge that appears "mite typical." Has the mite infection been confirmed after therapy? Sometimes, a telltale hard bit of ear wax must be removed from the ear before comfort is finally achieved. Sometimes a bacterial infection remains though the mites are long gone.

Treating for ear mites when none are present will not achieve results. Were all the hosts in the family treated? If all pets were not treated, begin again this time including all pets in the protocol. Consider using one of the new products.

Do not make the diagnosis of ear mite infection yourself. If you think your pet has an ear infection, see the vet for proper evaluation rather jumping straight to an over-the-counter remedy. You will need the right diagnosis before you can intelligently choose an ear treatment product.

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