



The Detestable Tapeworm

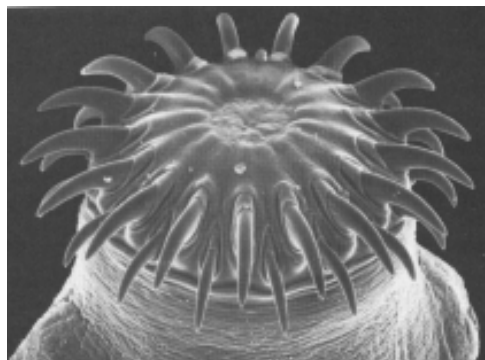
All worms are not alike

A common intestinal parasite treated by veterinarians is the tapeworm. Tapeworms have a unique life cycle which differs from other intestinal worms. The adult worm anchors itself to the lining of the gastrointestinal tract via a spike-like structure known as the rostellum. Unlike other worms, the adult tapeworm does not lay its eggs directly in the gastrointestinal tract. Rather, the eggs are contained in sections of the worm's body known as proglottids. These tiny segments are intermittently shed and emerge from the anus to eventually fall into the environment. At first, the proglottid can stretch and contract moving itself around. Eventually, the segment dries and releases its burden of eggs. Thus, routine fecal examination may not reveal tapeworm eggs. Veterinarians often rely on the pet owner observing the tapeworm segments in fecal material or on the fur around the anus to make a diagnosis of infection. The segments have been described as looking like a piece of uncooked rice.

Going my way?

Tapeworms require an intermediary host to

infect a dog or cat. That is, they "hitch a ride" with another animal. The intermediary host for the most common species of tapeworm in pets, *Diplydium caninum*, is our old friend the flea. Baby fleas (larvae) in the environment eat tiny bits of organic debris



The rostellum attaches to the intestinal wall

and frequently consume tapeworm eggs. In the flea's body, the tapeworm egg hatches and begins to develop. The flea is growing up as well and, eventually gets onto a dog or cat. The pet may decide to chew at this particular flea rather than scratch. The flea (and it's hitch-hiking baby tapeworm) are swallowed. The flea is digested but the tapeworm is resistant to digestion and

completes its life cycle.

On a scale from 1 to 10

How serious is a tapeworm infection? Compared to other intestinal worms, tapeworms do not present as immediate a health concern. Tapeworms are certainly offensive to pet owners. However, they rarely cause serious illness in small animals. The symptom most commonly seen is anal irritation due to the shedding of the worm segments. Usually this results in "scooting" - dragging the anus along the ground by sitting down and pulling forward with the front limbs. Sometimes, a segment can enter the anal sac resulting in inflammation. It is possible, although rare, for a large number of tapeworms to cause intestinal obstruction and some species can actually reproduce in the pet and cause disease. Despite this relatively low health threat, veterinarians recommend treating for tapeworms when diagnosed. Tapeworms are parasites and feed on nutrients in our pets' digestive systems. Treatment will eliminate any adult tapeworms in the pet. However, all it takes is our companions swallowing the right flea and they will be infected again. Thus, a key factor in controlling tapeworm infections is good flea control measures.

Staff News



Dr. Elizabeth Nesbit joins the staff

Welcome!

This summer **Dr. Elizabeth Nesbit** will be joining the veterinary staff at Shoal Creek Animal Clinic. Dr. Nesbit is a native of Edgewater, MD and received a B.S. in Biology from Wake Forest University. She

earned both a Masters in Medical Microbiology and her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Georgia. Dr. Nesbit was honored by the faculty at the Veterinary College with awards for outstanding proficiency in small animal medicine, surgery and clinical pathology. When she is not working, Dr. Nesbit enjoys running, cooking, gardening, and playing with her four dogs and cat. **Tanya Tuttle**, our new Hospital Manager, joined the staff last May after graduating from the Georgia College and State University. Tanya, a native of Conyers, has always had a love for animals and has worked with everything from fish to horses. Not surprisingly, her hobbies include horseback riding and fishing. She has a ferret and a cat (Annie and Bailey).

Keith Tillman is one of our newest veterinary assistants. Keith has worked in the information technology field for several years developing financial and insurance software systems. Keith recently moved to Athens to attend UGA in preparation for a new career in veterinary medicine. The Tillmans share their home with their cats, Bubba and Junior, and

dogs, Mickey and Cooper.

Kelly McCullough, a Biology major at UGA, is also a veterinary assistant at Shoal Creek and plans to apply to the Veterinary College in the fall. Kelly shares, "I rarely have spare time, but when I do I usually go for walks or watch cartoons. I have one cat, Mya, and a salamander named Moose."

Our newest front office staff member, **Ann Herring**, has worked in the veterinary field as a receptionist for the past decade. Ann has lived in the Athens area most of her life. She and her husband have a son, daughter, two grandchildren and a third grandchild expected in July. Ann spends her spare time gardening, antiquesing, and enjoying the company of her seven cats and two dogs.

Farewell...

After three years as a veterinary assistant at Shoal Creek Animal Clinic, **Elena Tolbert** has left to begin her new career as a registered nurse. Elena graduated from the School of Nursing at the Medical College of Georgia this Spring. She will be working in the Labor and Delivery Unit at the Athens Regional Medical Center. Congratulations, Elena!

Just the FAQ's

Internet users are quite familiar with the term FAQ or "Frequently Asked Questions." Most newsgroups and listservs have a FAQ file for the novice members as a reference so less bandwidth is used repeatedly answering the same questions. At Shoal Creek Animal Clinic, we welcome questions and encourage our clients to call if they have any concerns regarding their pet's health. In addition, we have developed our own Shoal Creek FAQ as a quick reference for common pet health questions. This edition of Shoal Creek News features the first in a series providing the answers to questions our veterinary staff are frequently asked by clients. For more Shoal Creek Animal Clinic Frequently Asked Questions, visit our web page at <http://www.shoalcreek.com>.

1. Can dogs have allergies?

Both dogs and cats can suffer from allergic conditions. Usually, our pets' allergic problems manifest themselves with very itchy skin rather than a runny nose or itchy, watery eyes as is common in people.

2. Is there something I can give my cat/dog to keep him calm on a car trip?

Sedation during travel is only recommended when absolutely necessary. Most sedatives will decrease a pet's ability to regulate body temperature and the pet may become overheated or hypothermic during travel.

When a pet's anxiety over travel merits sedation, it should be under the instruction of your veterinarian.

3. My dog is limping but I don't think its leg is broken. What should I do?

Have your pet evaluated by your veterinarian! Lameness (limping) can be a sign of numerous problems other than a broken bone. Lameness can be the result of anything from a thorn in a toe pad to a neurological disorder.

4. My dog ate some chicken bones out of the garbage. What should I do?

Be watchful for any sign of gastrointestinal distress - vomiting, diarrhea, inappetence, etc. If any of these symptoms develop, take your pet to be evaluated by your veterinarian. Finally, ensure that it does not happen again by relocating or securing the garbage canister.

5. My cat is urinating outside of his litter box. What could cause this?

There are two main reasons for inappropriate elimination. It is either the result of a behavioral problem, or it is the result of a medical problem. It is very important to rule out a medical condition before assuming the cause is behavioral. Cats are very prone to lower

urinary tract disease and some of these conditions can be life threatening in a very short time. Veterinarians feel that cats who are exhibiting abnormal elimination should be evaluated as soon as possible.

6. Why do I have to have my dog tested for heartworm disease every year even though he has been on preventive medication?

Heartworm preventives are prescription drugs. State pharmaceutical laws prohibit the dispensing of prescription drugs without both a valid doctor-patient relationship and proper evaluation for the use of a particular drug. The minimum standard of care with regard to heartworm preventives is an annual physical examination and heartworm test. Dogs are exceptionally susceptible to heartworm disease. There have been reported cases of infection in those on heartworm prevention. This may be due to a lapse in administration on the part of the owner or regurgitation of the medication without the owner's knowledge. Regular testing will catch such cases early, increase the likelihood of successful treatment, and prevent possible complications from placing a heartworm infected dog on preventive.

7. Can my pet get heartworm disease if I am a week late giving the preventive?

This is very unlikely with the newer monthly heartworm preventives available.

8. Do I need to test my cat for heartworm

disease...he never goes outside?

Heartworm disease is spread by mosquitos which are able to enter our homes. Research has shown that indoor cats actually have a higher incidence of heartworm disease than outdoor cats. (This may be due to the more sheltered immunological system in indoor cats.)

9. I don't ever board my dog. Do I still need the tracheobronchitis vaccine?

Many cases of Infectious Tracheobronchitis (ITBC) are diagnosed in dogs who are not boarded. ITBC is a highly contagious respiratory disease which is easily spread through aerosolized particles. An infected dog could be passing though one's yard and be a source of infection for a more sheltered pet.

10. I think my dog has an ear infection again. Can I just pick up some medicine and treat it the same way I did last time?

Although the symptoms may resemble the previous illness, it is not necessarily true that the causes are the same. Many different pathogens and medical problems can have similar clinical symptoms. It is not only improper medical practice but also a violation of pharmaceutical law for a doctor to dispense medication without evaluating the problem first. Further, some pathogens may develop resistance to previously used medications



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In This Issue... All about Tapeworms, Staff News, The SCAC FAQ

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