



EAR MITE INFESTATIONS

What are ear mites?

The ear mite (*Otodectes cynotis*) is a surface living mite which lives on cats, dogs, rabbits and ferrets. It is usually found in the ear canal but it can also live on the skin surface. The whole of the life cycle takes place on animals. Cats become infested by direct contact with an infested animal. The mite is just visible to the naked eye and can be seen as a white speck moving against a dark background (can usually only be seen down the ear with an otoscope).

What effect do ear mites have on cats?

Ear mites are by far the commonest cause of feline ear disease. They are the second most common ectoparasite found on cats, the most common is the flea. Infestations are most common in kittens and young cats although cats of any age can be affected. Clinical signs of infestation vary in severity from one cat to another and include combinations of:-

- ear irritation causing scratching at the ears or head shaking
- a dark waxy discharge from the ear
- areas of hair loss resulting from self-trauma - scratching or excessive grooming
- a crusted rash
- aural haematoma - a large blood blister cause by rupture of small blood vessels between the skin and cartilage of the ear usually on the inner aspect - caused by scratching at the ears

How are ear mite infestations diagnosed?

Typical clinical signs with a history of contagion (spread) between cats or cats and dogs would suggest the involvement of ear mites. Over 50% of feline ear disease is caused by ear mites. However other conditions can result in very similar clinical signs.

A vet can make the diagnosis by demonstrating the mite. This is usually straightforward and may be done either by examination of the cat's ears with an auroscope or by microscopic examination of discharge from the ear. If the ears are very sore the cat may need to be sedated or given a general anaesthetic to allow the ears to be properly examined.

How can I get rid of ear mites from my cat?

Treat the ears of all affected and susceptible in contact animals

Your vet will advise you about which insecticidal products are suitable. There are several ear medications licensed for the treatment of ear mites.

Your vet may ask you to continue the treatment regime for at least 21 days after which he/she may check the cat to ensure that the mites have been eliminated.

Do ear mites affect people?

Ear mites may cause an itchy rash on susceptible people if there are infested animals in the household. Eradication of the mites from the animals will cure the problem.