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***The common tapeworm (*Dipylidium caninum*)***

Live in the host's/dog's intestines, feeding off of the nutrients ingested by the host.

Tapeworm is a common dog illness caused by parasites and affects many dogs.

Tapeworm parasites live inside a dog's intestines and can grow as long as eight inches.

When a dog gets fleas and swallows one that contains tapeworm eggs, the condition will spread.

It's easy to tell if your dog has tapeworms because you'll see small white segments of the worm moving around in your dog's faeces.

Tapeworms can easily be treated with medication taken orally.

Short introduction and summary.

There are a number of different types of tapeworms that develop and infest in slightly different ways, but essentially, the worms live in the host's/dog's intestines, feeding off of the nutrients ingested by the host.

Generally, tapeworms become present in the host's /dog's body through; The ingestion of fleas, lice or another host animal.

To help prevent tapeworm infections, use flea preventatives and don't allow your dog to eat common intermediate host animals like wild game, uncooked meat or fish.

In most cases, tapeworm infections are asymptomatic, but if you notice nervousness, irritability, abdominal discomfort or weight loss, talk to your vet about possible infections.

Biology of the tapeworm parasite.

The adult Tapeworm - *Dipylidium caninum* - lives in the small intestine of the dog, attached to the intestinal wall by several suckers as well as a structure called a *rostellum* which resembles a hat with hooks on it.

Most people are confused about the size of a tapeworm because they only see its segments which are small.

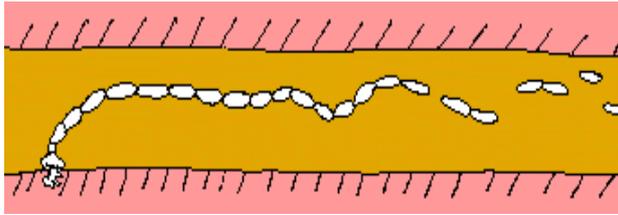


The entire tapeworm is usually 250 mm long or more.

*Head (or "scolex") of Dipylidium. The rostellum is the "hat." The round structures are suckers.*



*Adult Dipylidium. The segments are easily seen. The thick end is the tail where segments drop off.*



Adult tapeworm bites onto the dog's intestinal wall.



Segments drop off the tail. Once docked like a boat to the dog's intestinal wall, the tapeworm begins to grow a long tail.

(The tapeworm's body is basically a head segment to hold on with, a neck, and many tail segments).

Each segment making up the tail is like a separate independent body, with an independent digestive system and reproductive tract.

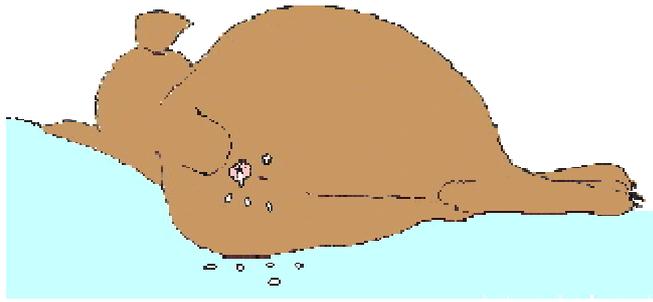
***Microscopic view  
of a tapeworm  
segment***

The tapeworm absorbs nutrients through its skin as the food being digested by the dog flows past it.

Older segments are pushed toward the tip of the tapeworm's tail as new segments are produced by the neckpiece.

By the time a segment has reached the end of the tail, only the reproductive tract is left.

When the segment drops off, it is basically just a sack of tapeworm eggs.



*As the dog sleeps, tapeworm segments are passed*

The sac, called a "*proglottid*," and is passed from the dog's rectum and out into the world, either with the dog's stool or through the dog's rear end.

The segment is the size of a grain of rice and is able to move.

Eventually the segment will dry and look more like a sesame seed.

The dry segment "sack" breaks and tapeworm eggs are released.

These eggs are not infectious to mammals.

The tapeworm must reach a specific stage of development before it can infect a mammal and this stage comes much later.

Meanwhile, fleas living on the dog have been happily drinking the dog's blood, mating, and laying eggs.

The eggs drop off the dog and onto the ground where ever the dog goes with the largest number of flea eggs accumulating in areas where the dog tends to frequent.

This will also be where tapeworm segments accumulate as well.

The flea eggs hatch, releasing hungry flea larvae that eagerly begin to graze on dust, dandruff, and flea dirt.

The flea larvae do not pay close attention to what they eat and innocently consume tapeworm eggs.

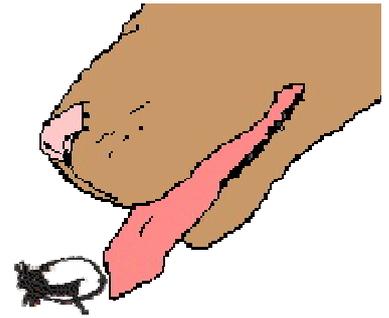


*Tapeworm segments*



*Tapeworm segments and*

*flea dirt are found together  
in the dog's bed.*



*The dog licks himself  
and swallows fleas*

*Tapeworm  
segment  
breaks,  
releasing eggs*

*eggs are  
eaten  
by grazing  
flea larva*

*Flea  
larva  
pupates*

As the larval flea progresses in its development, the tapeworm inside it is also progressing in development.

By the time the flea is an adult, the tapeworm is ready to infect your dog. The young tapeworm is only infectious to its mammal host at this stage of its development.

The flea goes about its usual business, namely sucking the dog's blood and reproducing when, to its horror, it is licked away by the dog and swallowed. Inside the dog's stomach, the flea's body is digested away and the young tapeworm is released.

It finds a nice spot to attach and the life cycle begins again.

It takes 3 weeks from the time the flea is swallowed to the time tapeworm segments appear on the dog's rear end or stool.

Controlling fleas is essential to prevent recurring tapeworm infestation

While many people would like to blame the tapeworm medication as ineffective, the truth is that there are an on-going flea population in the dog's environment.

The key to eradicating this tapeworm *Dipylidium caninum* from the home is flea control.

There is no other way for a dog to get *Dipylidium caninum* except from fleas.

### **Why is it called a Tapeworm?**

This creature gets its name because its segments and body are very flat (like a piece of tape).

### **How can you identify them?**

The adult tapeworm inside the dog can be up to 250mm long.

It is made of small segments, each about the size of a grain of rice.

The tapeworm's head hooks onto the dog's intestine by tiny teeth and the worm absorbs nutrients through its skin.

Each segment contains a complete set of organs but as new segments grow in at the neck area and older segments progress to the tip of the tail, the organs disintegrate except for the reproductive organs.

When the segment drops off from the tail tip, it is only a sack of eggs.

This segment is white and able to move when it is fresh and, at this time, looks like a grain of white rice.

As the segment dries, it looks more like a sesame seed.

### **Where do tapeworms come from?**

There is no other way for a dog to get *Dipylidium caninum* except from fleas. Many people who had thought their dog could not possibly have fleas find out about the infestation this way.

The tapeworm segment breaks open releasing its eggs.

A larval flea consumes the egg along with the flea dirt that it normally eats.

As the larval flea matures, so does the baby tapeworm.

When a dog groom himself by biting and liking - the dog licks the flea and swallows it, the dead flea is digested in the dog's stomach releasing the baby tapeworm.

The tapeworm is passed to its new home in the dog small intestine where it attaches and lives its life.

This parasite does not harm the dog in any way as there are plenty of nutrients passing by to serve both the dog and its tapeworm (tapeworms require very little nutrients.)

Still, high performance dogs like an APBT who need every calorie working for them, may show a decrease in performance because of a tapeworm infection.

**There is another type of tapeworm that may be confused with *Dipylidium caninum* and that is the Taeniagenus of tapeworms.**

This is a different type of tapeworm with a different appearing segment and a different mechanism of infection.

**Why do tapeworm sometimes fail to show up in a faecal test?**

Because the eggs are passed by the dog in packets (segments), they often do not show up on the faecal exam;

The packet must break open for the eggs to be seen.

Consider that the dog has tapeworms if segments are seen under its tail, around its anus, or on its faeces.

Segments can be passed in small groups connected to each other leading the owner to describe a worm that sounds larger than a grain of rice.

Tapeworm segments are also quite flat.

Difference between tapeworm segments and maggots.

Some people will mistake maggots in the stool for tapeworms.

Maggots are not seen in freshly passed stool and are not flat.

**Can humans get them?**

Theoretically, yes, people can get them but they must be infected the same way dogs and cats are - by swallowing an infected flea.

How do we get rid of them

Tapeworms are killed by different medications

Praziquantel -, which is administered by injection, tablet, or topically,

Epsiprantel, which is oral.

Fenbendazole is effective against several types of tapeworms but not against *Dipylidium caninum*.

**Why do the same vets recommend a follow up (second) treatment?**

There is no other way for a dog to get *Dipylidium caninum* except from fleas

Only one treatment is needed to kill the tapeworms in the body, however a second treatment is recommend in three weeks.

Because if you as the owner of the dog want to control tapeworms, you must first control fleas.

After initial worming, you will need at least 3 weeks to first control fleas and flea eggs on the dog and environment.

The reason is you still have a flea problem after the first tapeworm treatment, there is no reason why the dog cannot immediately re infect itself.

It probably will re infect itself at some point by eating another infested flea. The 3 week follow up worming will be crucial after the fleas are controlled. It takes three weeks from the time tapeworms are swallowed by the dog to the time segments can be seen by the owner.

### **On the other hand, who knows when the pet will swallow another infected flea?**

It is recommendation is that a single treatment be administered whenever segments are seen.

If one dog or puppy present tapeworm can it be assumed your other dogs do. No, just because one pet in the household has swallowed an infected flea does not mean they all have – but the probability that there will be more infested fleas around makes it sound advice to worm all dogs and puppies and continue to worm your dogs regularly – ask your vet for a worming and flea control program.

Fleas and worms co-exist and controlled accordingly.

### **Why do dogs continually be infected with tapeworms?**

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