

# Ear Mites in Cats – Symptoms and Treatment

 [www.cat-world.com.au/cat-ear-mites-symptoms-treatment.html](http://www.cat-world.com.au/cat-ear-mites-symptoms-treatment.html)

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## At a glance:

**About:** Ear mites are a spider-like parasite who live in the ears of affected cats.

**Transmission:** Infection occurs via direct contact with an infected animal or via contaminated objects such as bedding.

### Symptoms:

- Intense itching of the ears
- Coffee grounds appearance in the ears
- Head shaking
- Strong odour
- Scratches and trauma to the ears
- Secondary bacterial infection due to trauma

**Diagnosis:** A diagnosis can be made by physical examination of the ear and microscopic examination of exudates.

**Treatment:** A number of flea products can also treat ear mites.



## What are ear mites?

Ear mites are a common spider-like external parasite which causes significant discomfort to the cat. Although the name would suggest otherwise, ear mites can live on any part of the body although they generally live in the ear canal of cats. They are the most common cause of *otitis externa* (inflammation of the outer ear canal) in cats.

Ear mites occur mostly in kittens and outdoor cats, although any cat can become infected. They feed on epidermal debris and ear wax. The mites burrow into the cat's inner ear, causing inflammation which the body responds to by producing more wax.

While there are several types of mites which may infect cats, *Otodectes Cynotis* is the most common. The global distribution of *Otodectes Cynotis* ear mites is worldwide.

### Transmission:

Ear mites are extremely contagious and can easily pass from animal to animal. Infection can also occur via bedding and other household objects.

### Symptoms:



Image courtesy [Selbe Lynn](#), Flickr

Ear mites are extremely uncomfortable, these spider-like parasites live out their entire life cycle inside the ear of cats. It is not possible to see the mites with the naked eye, but there are plenty of clues your cat has ear mites.

The most common symptoms of ear mites in cats include:

- Extremely itchy ears which present as scratching
- Trauma due to excessive scratching
- Head shaking
- Strong odour
- Reddish/brown discharge in the ear
- Coffee-grounds like appearance in the ear
- Twitching

Further damage occurs as the cat scratches the ears:

- Scratch marks
- Bleeding from the ear due to damage caused by scratching
- Redness and swelling of the ear flap
- Crusty appearance along the edges of the ears

There may be damage to the ear if the infection has been present for a length of time. Damage to the ear can include a thickening of the skin, aural hematoma (a blood-filled pocket) or an ear infection due to damage caused by scratching. Ear infections are extremely painful and can potentially cause deafness if left untreated.

## Did you know?

In 1968, veterinarian Dr. Robert Lopez of Westport, New York decided to see if he could infect himself with ear mites. While examining a cat with ear mites, a three-year-old girl who shared her home with the cat complained of an itchy abdomen and chest. Once the cat's ear mite infection cleared up, the itching resolved in the little girl.

Dr. Robert Lopez inserted the debris/mites from an infected cat's ear into his left ear using a cotton bud. He immediately began to hear scratching sounds, followed by intense itching and pain. The sounds and itching intensified as the mites made their way further into his ear. The mites remained active for several weeks, by six weeks activity, the itching was gone. This story demonstrates just how an infected cat feels. Humans appear to have a natural immunity to the mite, as demonstrated by the recovery of Dr. Lopez without treatment. An infection will remain in cats until treatment is provided as cats are the natural host.

## Diagnosis:

Often a veterinarian can diagnose ear mites by direct examination of the cat's ears with an otoscope, an instrument with a light and magnifying lenses which will enable him to see the mites.

Your veterinarian may also diagnose ear mites by microscopic examination of material removed from your cat's ear.

## Treatment:

Treatment depends on the severity of the infection.

- Removal of the exudates from the ear by instilling a few drops of mineral oil and gently massaging the base of the ear. This will loosen the exudate, which will make it easy to remove.
- Your veterinarian will be able to prescribe a commercial insecticide to kill the mites. Products vary from country to country, but below is a list of popular products which may be prescribed. These treatments must be carried out over several weeks, it is not possible to kill the eggs or pupae. The aim of treatment is to kill adults as they reach maturity and break the life cycle of the mite.
- Treat all household cats and dogs at the same time.

## Ear mite products:

### Revolution (Selamectin)

- Topical spot on
- Kittens over 6 weeks old. Can use on pregnant and lactating females.

### Acarexx (Ivermectin)

- Otic suspension ear drops.
- Kittens over 4 weeks old. Safe use of Acarexx in pregnant and lactating females has not been established.

### MilbeMite (Milbemycin)

- Otic solution ear drops
- Kittens over 4 weeks old. Safe use of MilbeMite in pregnant and lactating females has not been established.

## **Ilium (Dichlorophen, Lignocaine HCl, Piperonyl butoxide, Pyrethrins)**

- Ear drops
- Check with your veterinarian. No minimum age listed.

## **Advantage Multi or Advocate outside US (Imidacloprid/Moxidectin)**

- Topical spot on
- Kittens 9 weeks and weighing over 1 kg (2.2 lbs). Safe use on pregnant and lactating females has not been established.

## **Fido's Ear Drops**

- Ear Drops
- Check with your veterinarian. No minimum age listed.

## **Safety:**

Do not use products for dogs to treat ear mites in cats, many contain active ingredients which are extremely toxic to cats.

Always follow your veterinarian's instructions when using these products. Some are administered IN the ears while others are applied to the back of your cat's neck.

Check with your veterinarian before treating kittens, pregnant or lactating cats to make sure you are not using a product which may be toxic to the kittens.

Don't attempt to clean the ears or administer medication with an earbud, not only can this force debris and wax further into the ear but it can potentially damage the ear also. Apply treatments with a cotton ball.

## **Are ear mites contagious to people?**

People may experience a mild rash or itching if cats in the household are infected, but generally don't become infected with ear mites, well unless they insert the debris/mites directly into your ear as the Dr. Robert Lopez did. It is, however, possible for dogs to become infected with ear mites from cats.

Preventing ear mites in cats:

There are a number of products available to prevent mites in cats.