Dear Alice,

I have obtained ringworm from my kitten! What is the best treatment for me to get rid of it and stop the itching?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's definitely time to ditch that itch! Unlike what the name implies, ringworm is a skin infection caused by fungus (not worms). It's contagious and is transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact with infected individuals and pets, or by contact with personal items used by infected individuals, such as combs, brushes, hats, bed sheets, floors, bathtubs. Anyone is susceptible to the infection, but toddlers, school-age children, those in contact with children, athletes in contact sports, and those in contact with animals (like you) are all at a higher risk of becoming infected. Ringworm can infect different parts of your body and the infection may look like a ?ring? or circle on the skin. Treating this fungal infection depends on the location of the affected skin and the severity of the infection.

Just like the various treatment options, symptoms of the fungal infection can differ depending on the location of the affected skin. The skin of your feet (or, athlete's foot [2]), scalp, beard, and groin (or, jock itch [3]) are all commonly affected areas. All of them usually involve itching (which may be extreme in some cases). Other symptoms may include:

- Patches of skin that are itchy, scaly, dry, or moist and sometimes may ooze. The patches may appear flat and clear at the center with a raised red border and clearly defined edges. If on the scalp, hair will become brittle and may break off in the infected area.
- Nails may change in color, thickness, and strength.
- Feet may be dry, scaly, and skin may crack, particularly between the toes.

Typically, the first defense in ringworm treatment is over-the-counter (OTC) antifungal or drying powders, lotions, or creams (containing miconazole or clotrimazole). In conjunction with the OTC medication, it's recommended to avoid wearing clothes that irritate your skin, keep your skin dry and clean, and wash your sheets and clothes every day while you?re infected. If
your infection is severe, does not respond to the medication, recurs, or if your scalp or beard are affected, it’s recommended that you see a health care provider. After an examination, s/he may prescribe oral medications (such as griseofulvin or terbinafine) and/or medicated shampoo. If a bacterial infection occurs due to scratching itchy skin, antibiotics may also be prescribed. Treatment will typically resolve the infection within four weeks. If after that time you don’t see an improvement, make sure to see your health care provider. In your case, Reader, treatment doesn’t stop with you; if you haven’t already, taking your furry friend to the veterinarian to be rid of the infection is also recommended.

Though it sounds like you’re in the itch of an infection right now, it’s not too early to think about preventing future infections. Keeping your hands and feet dry, regularly shampooing your hair, not sharing personal items (such as clothing, towels, hairbrushes, and other toiletries), and getting a pair of shower shoes (e.g., sandals or flip flops) to wear in the ol’ rain locker are all recommended prevention strategies. And, if you find that Ms./Mr. Meow Meow has bald patches (which may indicate an infection), it’s best to keep your petting hands to yourself.

Here’s to resuming critter cuddles soon,

Alice!

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