



**Good Friends
Animal
Hospital**

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Tapeworms

Tapeworms are long, segmented flat worms that live in the intestines of dogs and cats. The tapeworms produce eggs that are encased within the segments and are passed out in the stool. The eggs are picked up by another animal, either fleas if the tapeworm is *Dipylidium* or rabbits if the tapeworm is *Taenia*. The tapeworm undergoes some changes within that animal. Your dog or cat then eats the flea or rabbit, and the developing tapeworm grows into an adult in your pet's small intestine.

Tapeworms have hooks in their mouths and are able to latch onto the intestinal wall. They feed on the food that your pet has eaten. Signs of tapeworm infestation can include a rough hair coat, weight loss (unusual), diarrhea or itchiness in the anal area. Owners may see the segments passed out in the stool or attached to the fur around the anal area. The segments are flat and tan colored when freshly passed and may move around. After they have dried up they look like rice grains and are darker in color. You may also notice the segments in the pet's bedding.

Veterinarians often miss tapeworms in stool sample tests. We look for eggs when examining a stool sample. Tapeworm eggs are not present unless a segment breaks open and releases the eggs. Unless the segments are obvious in the sample they will be missed. We will treat pets based on your observations of the segments. Watch out for them if your pet has had fleas.

Treatment consists of one dose of medicine prescribed by a veterinarian. There is nothing in the pet stores that kills tapeworms. Another thing to remember is that the segments cannot infest your pet. Eggs must pass through fleas or rabbits before they can take hold in your pet. For the same reason, the segments are not a threat to people (just don't eat the fleas!).