What You Should Know About Tapeworms (Taenia)

Adult Taenia (te’ ne-ah) tapeworms live in the small intestines of dogs and cats where they produce eggs that are passed in the stool. The eggs are contained in segments called proglottids that detach from the rest of the tapeworm. These eggs contaminate the food supply of rodents, wild rabbits, sheep, cattle, and pigs. Once ingested by a suitable host, the tapeworm egg hatches and develops in the host’s tissues. Dogs and cats acquire Taenia tapeworm infections when they eat contaminated meat from one of these sources.

Signs

Normally, infections with Taenia tapeworms are not especially harmful to adult dogs and cats. Severe infections in young animals may cause nonspecific signs such as an unhealthy appearance and diarrhea. Occasionally, proglottids may crawl out of a dog’s anus and irritate the surrounding tissues. A dog affected in this manner may drag its bottom (scoot) on the ground or floor.

Diagnosis

Taenia infections are diagnosed when your veterinarian identifies proglottids or eggs. Taenia proglottids are white and rectangular or bell-shaped and may be found in the stool, on furniture or on the animal’s coat near the anus. Fresh proglottids may be seen crawling about in these locations.
Pets with Taenia infections usually have had access to rodents or rabbits, or these pets have been fed raw meat from slaughtered animals.

**Treatment and Home Care**

Dewormers designed to eliminate Taenia infections are highly effective, but reinfection may occur unless measures are taken to control the animal's hunting habits. Rabbits, mice, rats and raw meat from sheep, goats, cattle and pigs shouldn’t be fed to dogs and cats.

**Nutritional Plan**

After your pet has been treated for Taenia infection, your veterinarian may suggest a dietary change based on your pet's age and body condition, and on the presence or absence of disease in other organs and body systems. Optimal nutrition should provide for a pet's needs during each stage of its life. Optimal nutrition should also reduce the health risks associated with feeding excess sodium, calcium, phosphorus, protein, and fat. Foods that avoid these harmful excesses and provide proper nutrition for each life stage include Hill's® Science Diet® brand pet foods.

**Transitioning Food**

Unless recommended otherwise by your veterinarian, gradually introduce any new food over a seven-day period. Mix the new food with your pet's former food, gradually increasing its proportion until only the new food is fed.

If your pet is one of the few that doesn't readily accept a new food, try warming the canned food to body temperature, hand feeding for the first few days, or mixing the dry food with warm water (wait ten minutes before serving). Feed only the recommended food. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is important because the success or failure of treatment depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new food.

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**Home Care Instructions**

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<td>Patient's Name:</td>
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<td>Medication(s):</td>
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<td>Nutritional Recommendation:</td>
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