

## My Cat Has Black Specks in Her Fur

**CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, explains what those specks are - and offers caution on older cat's water intake.**

*By Arnold Plotnick, DVM*

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**Q:** Our cat is a 13-to-14-year-old female. She seems to lick and scratch herself more than normal. When we brush her, we see very tiny black specks. They are not ticks or fleas. Other than that, she eats normally and drinks plenty of water and seems to be in pretty good health. Any idea what these specks might be?

**A:** You may not be seeing any live fleas on your cat. However, fleas often leave evidence behind, and these specks may be what we call "flea dirt" (a more pleasant term than flea ... um ... poop). Fleas bite your cat, ingest blood, digest it and then eliminate on your cat. Flea dirt looks like little grains of pepper, as if someone has briefly sprinkled the pepper shaker onto your cat. Comb some of these specks off the cat with a flea comb, collect it on a tissue or paper towel, and then add a drop or two of water. If these specks appear to "bleed," then this is digested flea blood, and your cat has fleas, even though you cannot see them. There are many safe, effective monthly flea-control products (for example, Advantage, Frontline or Revolution) that you can purchase from your vet. This will easily solve the problem.

**P.S.** You mention that your cat drinks "plenty of water." If her thirst has always been like this, that's fine. If she is drinking more than normal these days, I'd also have the vet check it out. A 13-to-14-year-old cat is at increased risk for disorders that cause increased thirst, like chronic renal failure, hyperthyroidism and diabetes.