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Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral, in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

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be seen on the animal with the naked eye- hence the name 'walking dandruff'! Cats will often groom themselves enough that

you don't get to see the mites, though. Your description of flaking skin is typical- it usually mainly affects the 'dorsum' or over the back and tail base area. It is often not itchy, but can be so, as with your kitten. The appearance of Cheyletiellosis is a pretty typical one, but diagnosis can only be confirmed by visualising the actual mites or their mouthparts under the microscope.

The mite is more commonly seen on younger cats and kittens, but it's not really seen very much these days because most of the products used for fleas are also effective against Cheyletiella.

To answer the question about how your cat got the infection in the first place- it would have been through contact with another infected cat, or much less likely from environmental contamination. It tends to be highly contagious. If there is no chance this could have happened at your end, then the most likely explanation would be that he was carrying it already when you brought him home.

Treatment involves treating the animal and the environment. The most common treatments used for animals are Selamectin (Revolution) or Fipronil (Frontline) spot-ons—these should be used every two weeks rather than four weeks, for a couple of months. As these are common flea preventatives and treatments it is probably prudent to continue using this long-term every month. It is VERY important that you treat all animals in the household (and not just the cats!) Another alternative is using an oral treatment- both Milbemycin (Milbemax) and Ivermectin (Heartgard for Cats) can be used once to twice weekly. For the environment it is probably best to get professional pest exterminators in, and using any of the usual flea products should be effective.

Hope this is helpful and that you get this pesky infection under control!

My 6-month-old British Shorthair has been diagnosed with Cheyletiellosis or 'walking dandruff'. He started out with flaking on his skin which soon became itchy. Our vet gave us a regimen to follow with treatment and we seem to have come through the worst of it. I guess my question is twofold - how do we prevent this coming back and is it likely that he had it before we picked him up from the breeder? We're not sure what 'safe' insecticides we should use. The vet said that this mite is quite common, especially in younger cats, but we have no idea how he would have picked it up.

Terri R.

Dear Terri,

Isn't the term walking dandruff so wonderfully descriptive! Cheyletiellosis is caused by a mite infestation. Cats are the primary host for the mite Cheyletiella blakei (dogs usually get a different species). However, it's worth noting that other animals including people can become infected. Cats become infected by direct contact with another infected animal, or rarely from the environment. Only the adult mite is capable of living off the animal host; the other forms (eggs, larvae and nymphs) can only survive on the animal. It's possible for the adult mite to live for about two days in the environment (there have been reports of up to 10 days).

The dermis or skin is affected- the mite doesn't burrow deeply, and the mite is big enough that it can sometimes



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He achieved Membership of the Avian Health Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in 1996. In November 1996 he opened the first and only Sydney all bird and exotic pet practice. The Clinic moved to 1 Hunter St, Waterloo in 2003 and sees approximately 80% birds, and 20% fish, reptiles and other exotic pets. Alex is the current President of the Australian Veterinary Association Avian Group.

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If you keep your birds outside then it should be placed in a cage as far away as possible from all the other birds. Wild birds should also

be prevented from coming into contact with quarantined birds. If you are letting your bird out for a fly don't let them land on each other's cage.

Other precautions that should be taken include feeding the new bird and cleaning its cage after all the other birds have been fed and their cages cleaned. All seed and other waste should be removed and disposed of away from your existing bird.

The length of quarantine is a minimum of six weeks. If the bird is sick during this time then the quarantine period is extended by a further six weeks and the illness investigated. For exotic (overseas) birds the quarantine period may be longer. In some cases the new highly valued bird may need to be protected from infections of your other birds.

Some pet owners are reluctant to keep the bird separate for the six-week period. These owners often only keep the bird separated for approximately one week. This is not an appropriately safe period of quarantine to prevent infections. This period only allows for examination by an avian veterinarian and for the obvious display of a bird's already present clinical signs.

Signs to look for during quarantine are: any changes in the bird's behavioural patterns (especially its eating habits) are observed and any change to these or any clinical signs of disease are noted and treated.

Once you have the new bird at home it will need to be examined and some simple treatments administered. These include:

- Before entering the quarantine period the bird should be weighed and its general health checked.
- The bird should be examined and treated for mites and lice at the beginning and end of quarantine.
- The bird should be wormed at the beginning and end of the quarantine period.

It is generally recommended that in the first 3-14 days of acquiring your bird that an avian veterinarian performs a veterinary check. The veterinarian will:

- perform a general health check of the bird
- check for mites and lice
- perform a microscopic examination of the faeces and

Have you ever found a stray bird or acquired a new bird as a companion for your existing pet bird? Did you find within 1-8 weeks that either the new bird was sick or the other birds in the cage or aviary were unwell? The new bird may have brought in a new disease or have been infected with a disease that was already present in the aviary. As birds "mask" the signs of disease until they are very sick, the bird may have looked good at the time it was acquired but may have been harbouring a disease.

Quarantining new birds is the way to protect all your birds. The problem is that, unlike for cats and dogs, there are no vaccinations for most pet bird diseases, so quarantine is the only way to protect your pet bird. So if there are so many concerns, then is it a good idea to get another bird? The answer is a definite YES.

This is because birds like to live in groups and have a partner. This makes them feel safer and less stressed. Often we are out all day and our bird is left on its own. So we generally recommend having at home at least two birds of the same species to keep each other company during the day. In the majority of bird species two males will get on well, a male and a female often will be happy together, but two females may fight. Preferably the new bird should be of a similar age to your existing bird. If your existing bird is mature, especially if the new bird is young, it may take a few weeks to months to adjust to the new bird. Be prepared in the short term to have two cages. You will need a second cage in the short term anyway to quarantine the new bird.

So what does quarantine of a new bird mean?

Quarantine is the separation and isolation of all new birds from all other birds. All new birds are quarantined to prevent the introduction of new infections to the other birds already in your home or aviary. The new bird should be kept in a separate room to all the other birds.



- crop to look for worms, coccidia, megabacteria and motile protozoa (trichomonas, giardia and cochlosoma)
- often test the bird and/or prophylactically treat it for psittacosis (chlamydophila)
 - often offer more advanced tests that may be needed for highly valued birds. This may include disease tests for Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) and Polyomavirus. Blood tests for biochemistry and haematology may also reveal underlying illnesses.
 - also assess the behaviour of the new bird and its suitability to be with your other bird(s)

The majority of treatable problems will be detected during the six-week quarantine period. Many untreatable viral diseases may also be detected simply because of the bird's abnormal behaviour during quarantine. However a small number of diseases, especially some viral diseases

with long incubation periods, will not be detected.

The quarantine period is a great time to get to know your new bird and train it before it meets your other bird(s). Once your new bird has been through the quarantine period and has been judged to be healthy you can then consider having the two birds meet each other. There are various ways to introduce them. This may include putting them in the same cage, putting the cages next to each other or introducing them in a neutral territory area. Some birds may take up to a few months to warm to each other. In a small number of cases they may permanently be in separate cages next to each other. This is still okay as they will still be able to keep each other company in the daytime while you are out and make them both feel more secure.

IS IT REN? *(continued)*

They lived a quiet life together in Wollongong while Tomas grew up to become the mature working man he is today.

Unfortunately for Tomas, the world had cruelly not ceased to throw bricks at him. One morning, Ren was running around in the front yard as usual. When Tomas went to collect him, he realised Ren had suddenly disappeared.

Initially Tomas was not too worried, and looked for his energetic dog around the neighbourhood. He then called local vets, pounds, the RSPCA, regarding his missing, but micro-chipped dog. Tomas also enlisted friends to help create flyers to post all around Wollongong. Hours turned to days. Days turned to weeks. Weeks turned into months. Still no word.

In his heart, Tomas believed that Ren must have met some sort of fatal end. By this stage, his home had too many bad memories, and Tomas knew it was time to move away and try his luck in the big city, Sydney.

Years passed, and one fateful day in Sydney, I 'crashed' Tomas' birthday BBQ. He was athletic, funny, and one hell of a handsome package. I was smitten, and wonderfully, over time, love happened. We started a life together, got engaged, and were three weeks from our wedding day...

And then that crazy phone call.....

We step into Wollongong RSPCA. One of the girls is holding a little brown terrier mix. We are told he is blind, almost deaf, and walks with a limp. Tomas instantly takes hold of this dog. "It is definitely Ren!!"

I'm speechless.

This is the first time I meet my new pet.

We now have a dog. An old special needs dog at that.

I also have two adult cats, and a wedding in three weeks time.

However, I already love Ren, and of course I know how much he means to my beloved. I hold Ren all the way back to Sydney.

Lots of family and friends have since candidly mentioned that Ren's arrival and timing is 'interesting'. Some whisper that it is almost like Tomas' father giving a sign of approval of our union together. Others bring up the idea that fate is at work; if Ren had not disappeared, we would not have met, but now that Tomas' life is settled, Ren has somehow miraculously returned.

Tomas and I are not spiritually minded people at all, but we cannot deny that there is some sort of fantastical element in welcoming Ren back after his lost years. The best thing is that there is closure, and a very very happy ending!

Epilogue:

It's been speculated that someone must have stolen young Ren in Wollongong. Ren was looked after, though not particularly well. The RSPCA believe that as he became old and difficult to care for, the same people dumped him outside their door overnight. No one reported Ren missing until the day RSPCA contacted us. I cannot praise the micro-chip enough. It is such a wonderful and ingenious invention which has reunited a lost pet even after years of separation.

At the beginning, Ren needed some major vet attention and quite a bit of tender loving care. However, I am happy to report that he is healthy, has a voracious appetite, and is settling very well with our little family. Ren wags his tail whenever someone (or dog) plays with him, and he especially enjoys his walks twice a day.

We love him unconditionally. The cats are taking their time.