

Pawsitive Press

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Skin Disease 1
- Skin Disease Cont 2
- Miley/Hope for Paws 3
- Coupons 4

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Skin Disease

Patrick Hafner, DVM

Skin disease is very common in our canine companions. It is more common in dogs than in the feline population. There are several categories of skin abnormalities that affect dogs. Many of the various skin conditions we treat here at the hospital are either completely cured or controlled with proper treatment. Here are some of questions we frequently answer.

What are “immune-mediated” skin disorders?



The most frequently treated immune-mediated skin disorder in the canine is Canine Atopic skin disease. This condition occurs when the immune system becomes over active and reacts to different components of the environment causing itching,



licking, scratching or chewing of the feet, face and body. There are numerous things that cause a reaction from the immune system of the dog. Examples of these reactive substances are fleas, pollen, molds, grasses, trees, plants and dust-mites. Atopic allergy can become a long term chronic disease that requires constant attention. If we are able to decrease or eliminate the reactive substance from the environment of the dog we can control the allergic response and return to normal.

In Florida, it is very difficult in most cases to eliminate the problem because these substances are everywhere. Besides reduction or elimination of these offending substances from the environment there are three major ways to treat this condition. First, is by allergy desensitization where blood is drawn to find out to what our patient is reacting. With a series of allergy injections over many months

the immune system is “retrained” to react in a different manner to these substances. This halts the reactive process and the clinical symptoms mentioned above hopefully go away. Second, we will treat symptomatically with antibiotics if infection is present and also may use a steroid to reduce the biting, scratching, licking and chewing that we see. The third way we approach atopic allergy is by giving a medication to mildly suppress the immune system so the allergic reaction stops. All of these treatments work well some of the time but unfortunately not all of the time.

Another type of “immune-mediated” skin disorder is called Pemphigus foliaceus. Although not nearly as common as atopic skin disease it is the most common autoimmune skin disease of the canine. Blisters with crusting sores are seen most often on the face and ears but can affect the whole body. This condition along with the more severe autoimmune skin diseases are most effectively treated with strong drugs that counteract the intense immune response by the dog’s own body against itself.

What are hot spots?



Hot spots are technically called moist traumatic dermatitis. These intense, moist weeping areas come initially from some irritation that becomes infected with staphylococcal bacteria that normally reside on the skin. These bacteria take advantage of this heat, moisture, and breakdown of the top layers of the skin from trauma by scratching, licking or biting. A hot spot is like a brush fire turning into a forest fire in a matter of hours. This condition is treated with steroids, antibiotics, topical applications, clipping, cleaning and drying the affected area. Care must be taken to stop the trauma caused by the patient to the area involved. Anything that makes a dog itch can lead to a hot spot.

What is an acral lick granuloma?



This is a condition frequently seen in dogs on their legs. This begins as small irritation on the legs that causes the dog to lick excessively until the top layer of the skin is devoid of hair and an ulcerated red raw area is created. These areas are difficult to cure because there is an obsessive-compulsive nature to these lesions once they are created. There are many ways to treat these lesions. No one treatment effectively treats all of these cases. Antibiotics, antidepressants and covering the lesion to prevent the licking are some of the techniques utilized.

What is the difference between sarcoptic and demodectic mange?



Demodex Skin Mite



Sarcoptic Mange Mite

Both of these conditions are caused by a mite that invades the skin of our canine patients. The majority of demodex cases are in younger dogs. This condition is not contagious to other dogs or people. This is frequently called “red mange”. The vast majority of these cases are easily treated with some exceptions. Sarcoptic mange is another skin mite that can be found in dogs of all ages. One important difference here is that sarcoptic mange is contagious to both other dogs and to people. So, it is important to differentiate the type of mange that a patient has. Fortunately, sarcoptic mange is easily treated and eliminated when diagnosed properly.



Here's an inspiring story out of Los Angeles about a 1-year-old female Husky dog - found and presumed abandoned - at a trash dump. She was rescued by a dedicated animal lover named Eldad Hagar of [Hope for Paws](#) Animal Rescue Organization. Found in deplorable condition, her life begins to change for the better.



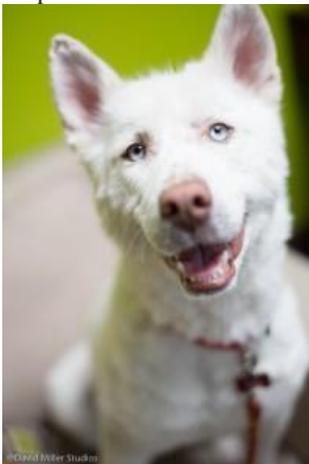
A Good Samaritan named Daniel observed a grungy dog walking by the railroad tracks at a nearby trash dump. He followed her to where she was apparently living. Snapping some photos, he texted them to Hope for Paws in an attempt to get the sad dog rescued. "I'm sure many others must have seen her, but no one attempted to help until Daniel," said Eldad Hager, Co-founder of Hope for Paws.

Responding to the tip, Eldad visited the dump site and found the dog he later named Miley laying down on some filthy cushions amongst the trash heap of old bicycle tires, telephone poles, discarded auto parts and much other unwanted debris. Covered with severe mange, she appeared resigned to her fate. Eldad had been told she had been surviving there for several months. He spent more than an hour with her, giving her food and gaining her trust.



[Watch the video](#) and see how gingerly she takes the food from Eldad's hand. Only a dog with a gentle soul would act so tentative when presented with fresh food while starving. When she allowed Eldad to put a leash around her neck, she eventually walked to his car for a life-saving visit to a veterinary hospital. Miley not only had a serious case of mange but she suffered from parasites, bacterial infections and malnutrition.

After many medicated baths and antibiotics for her infections, Miley began to heal. Eventually, she started responding to human compassion, giving Eldad sweet kisses. Yet, still, she guarded her spirit. Eventually she responded to another canine victim of neglect, a Chihuahua named Frankie.



Miley Now!



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