

Pawsitive Press

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Dermatology	1
Dermatology Continued	2
Skin Check Sheet	3
Coupons	4

Related Webpages:



Dermatology

By: *Dr. Patrick Hafner, DVM*

The word dermatology means study of the dermis or in plain English it means study of the skin. At the Animal Hospital of Dunedin we see a sizable proportion of our case load dedicated to concerns that involve the skin. There are many diseases of the skin both inflammatory and non-inflammatory in nature. The vast majority of skin cases we see involve the inflammatory type. This is because owners are concerned about the appearance of the skin and/or they are alarmed about the discomfort that the skin is creating. This discomfort is exhibited in the form of biting, licking, chewing and scratching. The primary causes of inflammatory skin disease come from the following sources. These include allergy, skin parasites, fungus, yeast, bacteria and immune-mediated inflammatory skin disease. 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 regarding allergically mediated skin disorders.



What are allergically mediated skin disorders?

The most frequently treated allergically 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 scratching, licking 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.

What can be done about allergically mediated skin disease?

1. Flea control is at the top of the list. If you don't control fleas you will be unable to control the itching, biting and licking

that bothers you and your dog so much. Topical products for flea control include Frontline and Advantage. These products have been around for years and when they work these are what I will recommend. However, if you have an active flea problem and an active skin allergy I will recommend an oral flea control product which will be either Comfortis/Trifexis or Nexgard. These products are presently the top of the line for flea control and are used for quick and complete flea eradication.

2. After flea control is accomplished and if allergically mediated skin disease persists then blood testing can be performed to see what other environmental allergens are causing our patient to remain symptomatic. Once those most reactive elements causing the allergic symptoms are identified we can have a specific allergy serum formulated to desensitize the body to these allergens. One breakthrough offered now is the oral administration of these liquid formulations instead of injections to "retrain" the immune system to not over react to these environmental allergens which cause the skin outbreaks to become so dramatic. Over a period of months this treatment can significantly reduce or

Dermatology Continued

eliminate the allergic symptoms. This is the closest we can come to curing allergy. Unfortunately in some cases this treatment is not effective.

3. Oral medications are sometimes used to suppress this overactive immune response by the body. The newest medication used for this purpose is Apoquel. Apoquel disrupts the inflammatory response. This prevents the sequence of events that leads to all of the symptoms our patient's experience. This medication does not have the large side effect profile that prednisone gives us. Apoquel has been a great addition to our allergy treatment protocol.

Cyclosporine is also an oral medication that can effectively reduce allergy symptoms by suppression the immune response.

4. After controlling fleas and in conjunction with the oral medications discussed above we must control secondary bacterial and yeast infections as part of a complete treatment plan. These secondary infections not only effect the skin but the ears as well. A comprehensive assessment needs to be performed on each patient to effectively treat skin disease.

What do I do if I suspect a skin condition in my pet?

Make an appointment immediately and let us check it out and treat it accordingly. The sooner we diagnose a skin problem the easier it will be to treat. Many skin conditions can become chronic and long lasting especially when they involve the ears so prompt handling of any skin condition is recommended.



Yeast Infection

If your dog can't seem to stop scratching an ear or licking and chewing her toes, ask your veterinarian to check for a yeast infection. Symptoms include irritated, itchy, or discolored skin. The infection usually strikes the paws or ears, where yeast has a cozy space to grow. Yeast infections are easy to diagnose and often respond well to a topical cream. In some cases, your veterinarian may prescribe oral drugs or medicated baths.

Seborrhea

Seborrhea causes a dog's skin to become greasy and develop scales (dandruff). In some cases, it's a genetic disease that begins when a dog is young and lasts a lifetime. But most dogs with seborrhea develop the scaling as a complication of another medical problem, such as allergies or hormonal abnormalities. In these cases, it is vital to treat the underlying cause so symptoms do not recur.

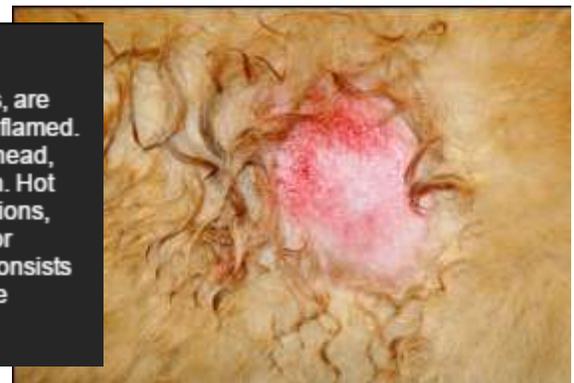


Ringworm

Despite its name, ringworm is not caused by a worm, but by a fungus. The term "ring" comes from the circular patches that can form anywhere, but are often found on a dog's head, paws, ears, and forelegs. Inflammation, scaly patches, and hair loss often surround the lesions. Puppies less than a year old are the most susceptible, and the infection can spread quickly between dogs in a kennel or to pet owners at home. Various anti-fungal treatments are available.

Hot Spots

Hot spots, also called acute moist dermatitis, are small areas that appear red, irritated, and inflamed. They are most commonly found on a dog's head, hips, or chest, and often feel hot to the touch. Hot spots can result from a wide range of conditions, including infections, allergies, insect bites, or excessive licking and chewing. Treatment consists of cleansing the hot spot and addressing the underlying condition.



For dogs who itch because of allergies, the 4 most common triggers include:

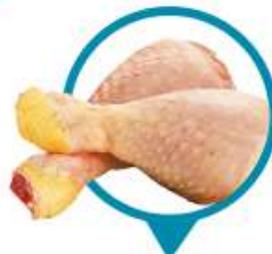


Fleas



Environmental allergens

(for example, pollen, mold and dust mites)



Food



Skin contact with allergens

(for example, carpet deodorants, shampoos and insecticidal products)

DOES MY DOG NEED MEDICAL TREATMENT?

When your dog suffers, your whole family can suffer too. If your dog's itching is caused by a medical condition, your veterinarian can help. Here are some clues that your dog may need medical treatment:



Excessive licking, chewing, biting or scratching

Excessive rolling, rubbing or scooting

Foot chewing



Hair loss

Recurrent ear problems

Changes in the skin, like sores or darkened color

Redness of the skin

Body odor

If your dog exhibits any of the signs listed above, talk to your veterinarian about it today.



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