

# Pawsitive Press

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## Dermatology

**By: Partick Hafner D.V.M.**

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.

**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 become over active and reacts to different components of the environment causing itch, 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 hopefully above 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

## Dermatology Continued

strong drugs that counter act 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.

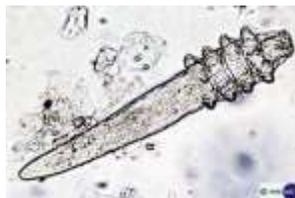
### **What is an acral lick granuloma?**

This is an inflammatory condition frequently seen in dogs on their legs. This frequently begins as small irritation on legs that causes the dog to lick excessively to the point the top layer of the skin is devoid of hair and an ulcerated red and raw area is created. This irritation is most commonly initiated by an allergy as well. 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, topical preparations, antidepressants and covering the lesion to prevent the licking are some of the techniques utilized.

### **What are the most common skin parasites we see?**

Demodex and Sarcoptic mites are the most common skin parasites however there are others less frequently seen. 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. Our feline friends also can have these skin parasites but not as frequently as we see in our canine friends.



Demodex skin mite



Sarcoptic mange mite

### **What type of infection involves yeast and bacteria?**

Yes, yeast is found in bread but also in the ears and in the skin. Yeast is in the fungal category of infections. Yeast and bacterial infections are the most commonly seen inflammatory conditions of the skin in the canine. It is usually a secondary invader of the skin and ears involving a patient that already has an allergy as mentioned above. Yeast and bacteria can be found on the skin of all canine patients but when either or both grow out of control due to the imbalance that occurs on the surface of the skin during allergic stimulation it can create the inflammation that causes the discomfort we so often see.

### **What is another fungal infection we see in dogs and cats?**

While there are several fungal infections in dogs and cats "ringworm" is another fungal infection most people have heard about. Ringworm is not a worm but rather a fungal infection that commonly starts out as a circular area of inflammation on the skin of dogs and cats. Left untreated it can involve the entire body as seen below. Once diagnosed ringworm can be treated relatively easily unless it has involved many members of a household or a cattery where there are many cats that can catch and harbor this infection. One concern about "ringworm" fungal infections is that this fungus also grows well in some people and therefore can be transferred from pet to human. Fortunately this infection is easily treated in people.



**Dermatology Continued**



Symptom Chart for Dog Skin Infections	
Bacterial (Pyoderma) Infection	Fungal (Yeast) Infection
Bumps, pimples, or open sores.	Smelly, greasy skin.
Constant licking at the affected area, causing the infection to spread.	Typically found in moist areas on your dog; ears, armpits, feet and any skin folds.
Shaking the head, scratching the ears, holding the head to one side.	Shaking the head, scratching the ears, holding the head to one side.
May have yellow or green discharge from ears.	A brown waxy discharge may be present in ears.
Usually the result of a secondary condition to allergies, fleas or mites.	Often follows antibiotic treatment. Frequently found in dogs that suffer from allergies.

**Skin problems in dogs due to mange, mites, allergies, and dog ticks lead to itchy dogs!**



One of the most common problems that affect dogs are skin problems. The skin is the largest organ on a dog and is the most common reason trips are made to the vets.



Look out for these symptoms



**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.



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**Expires 4/30/17 NL**

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