

DOG SKIN PROBLEMS PART I

Is your dog itching to death? Does your dog have hot spots? How about a rash? Skin disorders are among the most common health problems in dogs. The condition of dog's skin and coat can also be an important indicator of its general health. There are many causes of skin disorders in dogs that can vary from acute, self-limiting problems to chronic or long-lasting problems requiring life-time treatment. In Part I we will discuss the following: Allergic "Atopy" skin disease.

Allergic Atopy Disease

Unlike humans who react to allergens with nasal symptoms, dogs react with skin problems. Canine atopy, a hereditary and chronic inhalant allergic skin disease, usually begins by 10 months of age up to 2 years of age. Inhalant allergies which can cause an allergic reaction in dogs are much the same as those which cause reactions in people. These include pollens, dust mites, and molds. A clue to diagnosing these allergies is to look at the timing of the reaction. Does it happen year-round? This may be mold or dust. If the reaction is seasonal, pollens may be the culprit. Signs of inhalant allergies include: scratching, biting, chewing at feet, and constant licking. The itching may be most severe on feet, flanks, and armpits. Hot spots may develop due to irritation from constant chewing or scratching, which is then followed by infection. Allergies have also been implicated as a possible cause of Acral Lick Granulomas, a frustrating resistant condition, whereby the dog creates a sore on his skin from constant licking.

DIAGNOSIS

If a dog has the above symptoms and responds well to the treatment measures outlined below, no further diagnostic tests may be needed. If the problem is severe and does not respond to simple measures, allergy skin testing can be done. A portion of the skin is shaved and a variety of substances are injected into the skin to see if they provoke a reaction. If so, an individual series of injections are formulated to give the dog over a period of time. There are blood tests designed to identify allergens within our area without the skin testing. However, the skin testing has been proven to more reliable.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Symptomatic Therapy

A lot times just a good medicated bath once a week is enough to control the itching in some dogs.

Immunotherapy

Allergy injections or oral immunotherapy are very safe and many people have great success with them, however, they are very slow to work. It may be six to twelve months before improvement is seen. The average success rate varies from 50 to 70 %.

Corticosteroids

These compounds reduce itching by reducing inflammation. Unfortunately, they also affect every organ in the body. The amount of drug required is small or as a last resort to relieve a dog in extreme discomfort. Side effects can include increased thirst and appetite, increased need to urinate and behavioral changes. Long term use can result in diabetes, cushing's disease, decreased resistance to infection and increased susceptibility to seizures.

Antihistamines

Antihistamines can be used with relative safety in dogs. About one third of owners report success with them. The major drawback, as with people, is sedation.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

These fatty acids are natural anti-inflammatory agents. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fish oils (especially krill and cod). This supplement is different from those sold to produce a glossy coat. They tend to reduce inflammation that may lead to skin sores but are not as effective in reducing itching. We carry Omega-3.

Cytopoint

Cytopoint is an injection that is given every 4 to 8 weeks. It helps reduce itching, biting, and scratching the skin. Cytopoint is non-drug that stops the itch signal from reaching the brain.

Apoquel

Environmental Control

If you know which substances your dog is allergic to, avoidance is the best method of control.

Prevention

While there is nothing you can do to prevent a dog from developing allergies, breeders should be aware that allergic dogs **SHOULD NOT BE BRED!!!**

Part two will cover Food and Flea Allergy.