

SOUTH EAST COUNTRY VETS

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WHAT IS MAKING YOUR PET ITCHY?

Does your dog or cat drive you crazy during the day or keep you awake at night with their annoying scratching? Despite how frustrating this is for you, it is even more unpleasant for your pet. Dogs and cats, just like us, also suffer from allergies and skin diseases so it is important to have an understanding of the many reasons your pet may be itching. To accurately diagnose and treat your pet, you will need to work closely with your veterinarian as many skin conditions require long term patience, commitment and persistence to ensure they are treated appropriately.

WHERE TO START

To assist your veterinarian to first diagnose and then manage your pet's skin condition, you can help a great deal by providing some key information. Information such as where on their body your pet scratches, when you notice the itch occurring, if any other pets or humans are affected, what flea and shampoo products you currently use as well as your pet's diet are all very important in determining what may be causing the problem.

DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

After careful examination of your pet, your veterinarian may perform some pathology tests such as:

- Full physical examination
- General health blood profile and urine screening
- Skin scraping
- Hair pluck
- Skin biopsies
- Microscopic examination of discharges



After a range of tests have been completed your veterinarian will often then be able to advise which condition/s they believe is causing your pet's skin abnormalities. Keep in mind that it can take a process of elimination through medication and food trials in some cases to get the real cause.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Treatment will be determined after diagnosis of the condition and in consultation with your veterinarian. If therapy is trialled without success then it may be recommended that an appointment with a referral Veterinary Dermatologist be made for further work up. Such tests that may be conducted there include blood tests, intradermal allergen testing and medication alterations.

Skin conditions can be time consuming and frustrating for both you and your pet. Being persistent with parasite control and following your veterinarian's advice carefully and checking in regularly with them is important in treating your pet's condition.

COMMON SKIN CONDITIONS IN PETS

Flea Allergy Dermatitis

What is it?	Symptoms?	Diagnosis?	Treatment?
Hypersensitivity to saliva from flea bites, only requires <i>one</i> flea bite. More common in warmer months but can be seen year round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intense itching and hair loss over lower back, tail head and thighs (can spread to entire body); cats show signs around head and back - restless, red skin, skin infections, skin thickening, weight loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symptoms are often diagnostic - presence of fleas and their excrement on coat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consistent and regular flea prevention of ALL household animals with a proven product (eg. <i>Simparica</i>, <i>Bravecto</i>) - a short course of antibiotics and/or steroids may be required in early stages - soothing oatmeal shampoo

Atopic Dermatitis + Contact Allergies

What is it?	Symptoms?	Diagnosis?	Treatment?
Allergic reaction to an allergen present in the environment (eg. grass, mould, pollens). Can be a passing or seasonal reaction but is often an ongoing disease if the allergen is present year round in the household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intense itching and hair loss over around feet, belly, groin, arm pits and hairless areas (can spread to entire body) - red skin, self trauma, skin infections, smelly skin, inflamed ears - asthma, runny eyes or nose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - typical symptoms - history of exposure to allergens - ruling out other allergy causes such as parasites and food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Atopica</i> immune modulating therapy - a short course of steroids +/- antihistamines +/- antibiotics may be required in the early stages - reduced exposure to allergens - soothing oatmeal or medicated shampoo

Food Allergy

What is it?	Symptoms?	Diagnosis?	Treatment?
Allergic reaction to a particular protein in animals food (eg. beef, dairy, wheat, egg, soy etc) Distinct from a food intolerance which causes only gastrointestinal signs when fed a particular food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - itching or licking at the skin after eating certain foods - soft stools, diarrhoea - irritability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feeding a prescription 'novel' protein diet ONLY for ~8-10wks; if improvement is noted then a food allergy is likely - dietary trials may then be done to determine what protein it is that is causing the skin problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a 'novel' protein diet may have to be fed for the rest of the pets life - if the protein they are allergic to is diagnosed then it may be enough to simply remove this from their diet (eg. never feeding tuna based products)

Otitis – Ear Infections

What is it?	Symptoms?	Diagnosis?	Treatment?
Inflammation of the ear canal often accompanied by a yeast or bacterial infection. May be caused by moisture in the ear (humid weather, swimming), inflamed ears (food allergy) or foreign body in ear (grass seed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ear pain, head shaking and scratching - smelly/discharge from affected ear - head tilt and inability to maintain balance in severe cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - typical symptoms - otoscopic visualisation down ear canal - microscopic examination of ear discharge to identify organism present - culture and sensitivity of ear discharge at external laboratory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mild cases: ear cleaner, medicated ear drops +/- anti-inflammatory +/- antibiotics - severe cases: ear clean under general anaesthetic followed by treatment as above - allergy management

Demodectic Mange

<p>What is it? Infestation with the mite <i>Demodex sp.</i> that lives normally in hair follicles of all animals. More common in animals that are younger, pregnant or have an underlying medical condition that suppress the immune system and allow mite numbers to proliferate</p>	<p>Symptoms? - itchy painful skin and hair loss around the eyes, head or entire body - bacterial skin infections * the mites do not spread to other pets or people</p>	<p>Diagnosis? - skin scraping or tape impression of affected area – mites are visualised under a microscope</p>	<p>Treatment? - anti-parasitic therapy given weekly until there are two negative skin scrapes (approx. 8-14wks of treatment) - a short course of antibiotics may be given to treat bacterial infection - soothing oatmeal or medicated shampoo</p>
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Sarcoptic Mange

<p>What is it? Infestation with the mite <i>Sarcoptes sp.</i> after contacting another infected animal. Infected animals do not always show signs</p>	<p>Symptoms? - intensely itchy and painful skin around the abdomen, chest, legs and ears * these mites <i>can</i> spread to other pets or people</p>	<p>Diagnosis? - typical symptoms - skin scraping or tape impression of affected area – mites may be visualised under a microscope - response to treatment if no mites are visualised but symptoms are suggestive</p>	<p>Treatment? - anti-parasitic therapy given weekly until there are two negative skin scrapes; <i>all</i> household animals to be treated - a short course of steroids +/- antibiotics may be given to treat bacterial infection - soothing oatmeal or medicated shampoo</p>
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Hormonal & Metabolic Diseases

<p>What is it? Reduced or increased function of particular hormone producing glands (eg. thyroid, adrenals) resulting in metabolic, skin and other disturbances.</p>	<p>Symptoms? - vary depending on the disease - itchy skin, recurrent infections, dry skin, hair loss, change in pigment - increase/decrease in activity, appetite, weight etc</p>	<p>Diagnosis? - typical symptoms - full general health profile blood test</p>	<p>Treatment? - medical or surgical treatment as required</p>
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This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for a veterinary consultation.

It is recommended that a consultation be arranged with a veterinary practitioner if you have any concerns with your pet's health.