

Atopic dermatitis

Dermatitis (infected skin) is a disease that occurs in dogs and cats and can develop at any age, especially in breeds who are genetically predisposed to skin sensitivities and immune response conditions. This type of disease is often hereditary. Animals are more likely to exhibit this disease as they have a very poor, thus ineffective, skin barrier. This leaves them open to easier penetration of yeast and bacteria which invade the skin surface, resulting in the body's immune system producing an extreme response. This response can be severe skin inflammation leaving the patient uncomfortable and constantly itchy, most commonly around the face and paws.

While there is no cure for dermatitis, but there are strategies we can use to attempt to significantly reduce the discomfort experienced by the patient. The level of reduction is dependant on a case by case basis, the more severe the disease the greater management required.

Due to the fact that skin problems can be caused by a wide variety of reasons, it can take a process of elimination approach to achieve results. Client compliance is very important in helping to achieve a good outcome in these cases, as often certain aspects of the patients lifestyle will be recommended to be withdrawn or limited, such as certain dietary or environmental factors while trying to assess primary issues.

Clinical signs:

The signs of dermatitis may vary from mild to severe based on the chronicity and areas affected. Signs may include any of the following:

- Alopecia
- Rashes/hot spots
- Excessive itching/self trauma
- Strong skin odour
- Weeping, sore patches of skin
- Discoloration of skin
- Over-grooming/Hair loss
- Dry, flaky skin (Dandruff)
- Thickened skin
- Recurrent ear infections

Common causes:

- Allergies to food
- Fleas (especially in Cats)
- Contact allergies (environmental)

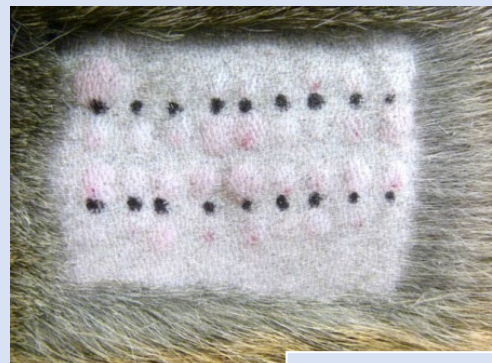


Image courtesy of NDSR.co.uk

Treatment - The goal of treatment is to minimize discomfort, slow the progression of damage to the skin surface, and allowing the body time to heal this can be achieved with a combination of therapies, which may include:

- Parasite treatment
- Medicated shampoo
- Dietary exclusions
- Intra-dermal allergy testing
- Monoclonal antibodies
- Allergy specific immunotherapy
- Antibody therapy
- Essential fatty acids



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