

Skin problems in dogs: an overview

Overview

Skin is very important for protection and keeping the body warm. Skin problems can significantly affect a dog's quality of life and make them feel miserable.

Skin disease ranges from mild to severe depending on the cause. It's always best to book an appointment with your vet if you notice something wrong with your dog's skin, waiting can lead to more serious problems developing.

Signs of a skin problem

- Itchy skin
- Bald patches (alopecia)
- Dry flaky skin
- Dermatitis (red, inflamed, sore skin or a rash)
- Smelly, weepy skin (pyoderma)
- Coat colour change (often a pink, brown or orange tint to the fur is due to saliva staining)

Causes of skin problems

There are many different things that can cause skin problems in dogs, some of the most common include:

Fleas and other parasites

- Fleas are a very common problem in dogs. They cause itchy skin, especially around the lower back.

- Mites and lice (such as demodex and mange) can cause red, irritated skin and intense itching.

Allergies

- Second to fleas, allergies are one of the most common causes of skin problems in dogs. Allergic skin disease (atopy) often causes itching, redness and many other symptoms.
- Severe allergic reactions can cause hives, rashes and swellings anywhere on the body. Contact your vet ASAP if you suspect your dog is having a severe allergic reaction – this is an emergency.

Skin infections

- Bacteria and yeasts normally live on dog (and human) skin without causing any problems. However, if the skin is damaged an infection can take hold.
- Bacterial infections often cause red, circular patches on the skin that sometimes smell pungent. Hot spots (moist dermatitis) are patches of red, infected skin, they appear very quickly, look wet and often weep.
- Yeast infections may cause your dog to develop a greasy coat and a sour smell.
- Ringworm is a fungus that causes circular patches of red, raised, hairless, itchy skin. Fortunately, ringworm is quite rare in dogs.

Wounds

- Wounds can cause pain and discomfort and can easily become infected.

Hormone problems

- Most hormone problems have effects on the skin and fur.
- Hypothyroidism often causes dogs to lose the hair on their tail and causes thinning of the hair on their sides. Dogs with

hypothyroidism also often gain weight, have very low energy levels, flaky skin and a dull coat.

- Cushing's disease often causes thinning of the hair and bald patches on a dog's sides. Dogs with Cushing's are more likely to get skin infections. Some dogs with Cushing's also get calcium deposits in the skin which form bumpy white rashes.
- Sometimes imbalances in sex hormones (such as oestrogen) can cause hair loss in dogs.

When to contact your vet

Skin conditions can be very uncomfortable and often very painful, especially if they are severe or go on for a long time.

Contact your vet if your pet has a skin problem that doesn't clear up in a few days. If you see blood or pus coming from their skin it is important to see a vet as soon as possible.

You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Published: August 2018