Seborrhea in Dogs

Overview

Peee-ewww! If this is your reaction when you are around your four-legged friend, or if he is super itchy, he might be suffering from a skin condition called seborrhea or seborrheic dermatitis. Seborrhea is common in both dogs and their owners, but for dogs the most common symptom is itchy, stinky skin.

There are two types of seborrhea: oily and dry. Many dogs have a combination of both. Seborrhea causes the skin to release a waxy, greasy substance that formulates in the ears and armpits and around the belly, elbows, and ankles. This greasy substance is very fatty and VERY smelly. It causes dogs to itch like crazy; often, the affected areas become crusty and bleed. Frequently, secondary infections can set in due to itching-induced open sores.

There are two causes of this greasy, stinky condition: genetics and unrelated underlying conditions.

Breeds most commonly affected with the genetic form of seborrhea are:

- German shepherds
- West Highland white terriers
- Cocker spaniels
- Basset hounds
- Dachshunds
- Labrador retrievers
- Golden retrievers
- Doberman pinschers
- Shar-peis

Seborrhea can also be the result of an underlying cause or condition, rather than a problem with the skin itself.

This is often the case when older dogs develop seborrhea; some of the causes or conditions include:

- Allergies
- Endocrine disorders
- Dietary deficiencies
- Absorption disorders
- Parasites
- Autoimmune disorders

Aside from a nasty, foul odor, symptoms of seborrhea may include a greasy, oily coat; scaly skin; and dandruff- like flakes in the fur.

Diagnosis/Treatment

Your veterinarian will conduct a thorough history and physical exam of your dog.

Other tests may include:

- A skin scraping to rule out parasites
- Fungal and bacterial cultures
- A fecal exam to rule out fecal parasites
- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function as well as sugar levels
- A complete blood count, chemistry panel, urinalysis, and thyroid tests to look for evidence of underlying disease, such as hypothyroidism
- Cortisol tests to rule out Cushing's syndrome, a common hormonal disorder in older dogs that is often accompanied by skin problems

Treating seborrhea depends on the cause. If it is a result of an underlying condition, treating that condition will help to control it. If the cause is genetic, there is no cure but there are ways to control the seborrhea. These may include the use of shampoos and conditioners, fatty acids and vitamin/mineral supplements, and other medications, such as antibiotics, to treat any secondary infections.

If you suspect your pooch has seborrhea, contact your veterinarian for more information. They are the best source of information about the health and well-being of your dear pet.