



## **Itchy Skin**

Itchy skin is a common problem for many dogs. It can range from the occasional scratch through to severe, debilitating, generalized irritation and infection. Some dogs may have localized skin problems such as just the ears, paws or belly, while other animals may suffer from an all over itch.

### **What are the signs of itchy skin or poor skin health?**

- Generalised scratching and rubbing
- Redness of the skin
- Hair loss from repeated biting, licking, chewing or scratching
- Skin rash, infections and irritation
- Scabs and bleeding
- Unusual odour
- Skin thickening and colour changes, sometimes accompanied with greasy coat
- Scale or crust on the skin
- Ear infection.

### **What can cause itchy skin in my dog?**

There are many different causes of itchy skin some of them include:

- External parasites such as fleas, mites (demodex or sarcoptes) or lice.
- Skin infection (bacterial or fungal)
- Contact with substances that create an itch reaction such as wandering jew plants or certain cleaners.
- Insect bites – such as ant bites or bee stings
- Food allergies
- Atopy (allergic skin disease).

Hair loss without the “itch” is also important to rule out as it can also be seen with problems such as metabolic disease, genetic abnormalities, hormonal changes and immune mediated diseases.

### **How can we tell these apart?**

A thorough clinical exam and detailed history will often help your vet narrow down possible causes, however skin disease is often a very complex and can be difficult to fully resolve.

You vet can check for parasites and skin infections by performing a thorough clinical exam and by checking samples under the microscope. Some parasite infections can be difficult to diagnose so starting on preventative spot on parasite control such as Advocate or Revolution is often recommended.

If contact allergies are suspected, then preventing your pet from coming into contact with the offending substance/plant is recommended – eg removing the wandering jew from the backyard or changing laundry detergent.



For cases where food allergies are suspected or in order to rule it out as a possible cause of itchy skin, then an elimination diet trial is often recommended. This requires starting them on a strict, single food source that they have previously never had before, for at least 8 weeks and then re-challenging them with different foods to work which they are sensitive too. Royal Canin Hypoallergenic or Hill's Z/D are two diets commonly recommended for a food trial. If they consume anything other than the specific diet and water during the trial then it will alter the results and we will need to begin the trial again. This mean definitely no treats, bones or left-overs!

Atopy or allergic skin disease is an allergic reaction to microscopic allergens. It often presents initially between 1-3 years. It is a diagnosis made by excluding all other possible causes (ie we would need to rule out food allergies, contact allergies and external parasites).