

Answers to your 3 most burning questions on ear and skin infections



Scratch your itch for information about your pet's ears and skin with this handout.

1

MY PET DOESN'T HAVE FLEAS—SO WHY DOES HE CONSTANTLY SCRATCH HIMSELF?

It's important to know that fleas themselves aren't always the culprit behind skin issues—in fact, allergies may be to blame. When pets inhale, come in contact with or ingest something they're sensitive to, they'll begin to itch or rub excessively. This process can change the skin's surface and can allow for an overgrowth of bacteria or yeast. An overgrowth of bacteria on pets' skin or in their ears is called pyoderma. An overgrowth of yeast is called *Malassezia* dermatitis.

Because an itchy pet may be suffering from a food or airborne allergy, it's important your veterinarian knows what you are feeding your pet, where it travels, and its home environment. Also, think about when the symptoms occur. Are they seasonal or year-round? Do they only flare up when the pet goes outdoors?

All this information will help your veterinarian determine which diagnostic tests to recommend, as well as help him or her identify the underlying cause of infection.

2

WHY DOES MY ITCHY PET NEED THESE DIAGNOSTIC TESTS?

How to decrease the scratching depends on what started it. Without identifying the underlying cause of the skin or ear issue, you're fighting a losing battle. The current problem may resolve but it will recur.

To confirm or rule out possible triggers, veterinarians will order tests. If the doctor suspects food allergies, the pet may need to undergo a dietary trial. It may take eight weeks of feeding the special diet before clinical improvement is noted. The doctor may call for skin scrapes or serum tests to identify airborne allergens after discarding all other diseases as the source.

Regardless of what caused the skin problem, tests are necessary to determine the best treatment for your pet.

3

SO, WHAT'S THE CURE?

Just like with humans, there's no cure for pets' allergies. While the underlying cause of a food allergy can be eliminated, the allergy would still remain. Antibiotics and antifungals help clear an infection, but they can't prevent recurrence. That's why it's necessary for pets with skin and ear issues to get regular follow-up visits, which allow your veterinarian to make sure the infection is gone—otherwise it could continue to get worse. Also, follow-up visits give you and your veterinarian the chance to discuss the game plan for managing the pet's allergies.

While you should always be on the lookout for telling signs such as pain, redness, odor, head shaking, and itching, know that you don't have to manage your pet's skin or ear disease on your own. Allowing your veterinarian to monitor and manage the skin or ear problem ensures that it won't get out of control or become more painful or irritating for your pet.