Skin Problems in Dogs
--- the case for a holistic approach

Responsible pet ownership means a proper diagnosis of any physical symptoms of distress. Unfortunately, in many cases of the "itchy, scratchy" dog, it is likely that the individual will already have seen a Veterinary Surgeon and the condition is a chronic recurring one of indeterminate source that may be environmental and nutritional compounded by secondary bacterial infections and influenced breeding.

This is a category that can benefit from a holistic approach including natural foods, supplements, house dustmite treatments & chemically friendly, medicated skincare. However, it is important to understand that there are categories that should be seen by a veterinary surgeon if they have not already done so.

Categories that should be seen by their Veterinary Surgeons

- Puppies of 1 year or less who may be suffering from one of the very serious genetic disorders or Type 1 diabetes
- Dogs, 7 years of age or more, overweight, lethargic &/or drink a lot of water that may have type 2 diabetes, underactive thyroid or kidney problems

Categories at risk if they are not on flea/roundworm control Programmes:

- Young or rescue dogs that have clearly suffered from stress, poor nutrition & healthcare in early life who may be prone to demodectic mange or ring-worm
- A country rambler/hunter that comes into contact with foxes and other wildlife that may have sarcoptic mange often miss-diagnosed as atopic (allergic) dermatitis

Typical Symptoms of problem skin

Problem skin typically means that the dog has one or more of the following:

Pruritis – Non stop itching
Sebhorroea – Excessive sebum: a greasy, matted coat often smelly because of yeast infections namely Malassezia furfur or Pityrosporum ovale
Erythema – Reddening and darkening of the skin
Dermatitis – Inflammation of the skin with intense itching & licking
Pyodermatitis – Inflammation of the skin with intense itching and licking and secondary infections
Moist Eczema – "Hot spots" or crusty lesions with secondary bacterial or fungal infections
Hyperkeratosis or demodicosis – Excessive skin cell reproduction similar to psoriasis in humans
Pyrrhoea – Skin thickening and scar tissue
Follicular dysplasia or alopecia – Hair loss and bald patches, often genetic where location varies according to breeds
Acral lick dermatitis or Lick Granuloma – Persistent, obsessive licking & chewing of certain areas leading to repeated episodes of self-mutilation, partial healing then repeated trauma & healing. Usually confined to an easily accessible forelimb.
Pyoderma – Pus filled lesions or weeping sores caused by secondary infections
Secondary Infections – Bacterial, fungal and viral infections that are taking advantage of the depressed immune-system and anaerobic abrasion of the skin e.g. Staphylococcus intermedius, Acanthosis nigricans, Staphylococcus aureus (antibiotic resistant MRSA), Malassezia pachydermatitis (fungus – yeast), Escherichia coli & Micrococcus luteus
Parasitic dermatitis – Dermatitis caused by fleas, ringworm or mites (mange)

The age of the dog, the breed and the combination of symptoms all contribute to diagnosis or at least elimination of certain conditions.

Common causes of problem skin in the dog

In order of frequency, the main causes of skin conditions are:

- Flea allergy & roundworms or tapeworms
- Dustmite allergy
- Food & nutritional allergies/intolerances
- Chemical sensitivities to flame retardants in carpets & furnishings; parabens, fragrances & other additives in toiletries, plastics, & floorings
- Parasites – Mites (mange), ticks & ringworm
- Genetic & neuropathic (breeding, nervous & behavioural

KEY POINT:

Firstly, make sure that you have a proper flea & control programme in place bearing in mind that the fleas may be resistant to some of the solutions that have been commonly used in the past. Persistent infestations that do not respond to treatment should be discussed with your Veterinary Surgeon.

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According to Veterinary experts, around 70% of itchy, scratchy dogs are allergic to dustmites and these are ubiquitous in modern homes with central heating, closed windows and skin cell rich soft furnishings for food and shelter. Dustmite and/or food allergies often precede chemical sensitivities to every day things in the home. Distinguishing between dustmite, nutrition and chemical sensitivity can be extremely difficult. In many cases, the dog is allergic to a whole host of things.

It is also important to note that nutrition per se plays a key role in every skin condition because it is what is known as a "predisposing" factor. If the nutrients in the food are lacking because of poor quality ingredients or heat destruction in processing or the food contains additives and preservatives that interfere with absorption or are even toxic, the first symptom is often problem skin and a dry coat. Nutrition is the key to a healthy immune system and any owner who thinks they are saving money with cheap dog food is likely to have to spend 10 fold at the veterinary surgery!

Lastly, bear in mind that dogs are highly intelligent and just as prone to stress as we are. If the dog is left for significant periods, make sure he/she has bones and toys for entertainment or better still a companion. Always show delight when you are re-united – dogs give back ten fold the affection that they are shown – but easily succumb to neurotic behaviour if ignored!

■ Visit **www.biolife-international.co.uk** for more information.

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

- High quality foods with clearly labelled ingredients and with no additives or preservatives e.g. **Nature's Diet™**
  - Treats: **Bones from the butcher or additive free dog biscuits** – AND NO OTHER!
  - Chemical friendly, antimicrobial skin care e.g. **Bio-Life Home-Cleanse™**

For dustmite in pet bedding & furnishings:

- **Bio-Life Fabricleanse™** – for dustmite in carpets
- **Bio-Life MediCleanse™ Shampoo & Conditioner**
- **Bio-Life MediCleanse™ Pure Essence or Paw & Patch Gel** plus **Paw & Patch Moisturiser** depending on the condition
- **Garlic** as a natural tick & flea repellent & **Kelp & Omega 3 & 6** to help restore thyroid & immune function.