



Seborrhea

Seborrhea is a skin condition in which the sebaceous (oil) glands of the skin don't function properly. It causes a scaly, flaky, sometimes oily, often red, itchy skin. It can be either a dry form called *seborrhea sicca* or an oily form called *seborrhea oleosa*. Seborrhea is uncommon in cats, though Persians, Himalayans, and a few other breeds can have it. Pets may have a combination of the dry and oily.



You will see dandruff on your pet or in its bedding. The skin can be red and irritated. The coat may have either a

dry or a greasy feel. It may be worse in areas where there are skin folds. If it's the oily form, it will usually be smelly due to the oil turning rancid. The pet may have a build-up in the ears. A bacterial or yeast infection on top of it is common and that will add to the odor, sores, and itchiness.



Causes

Seborrhea can be either primary or secondary. Primary means that the pet has inherited a defect in the skin so the glands don't function normally. The body doesn't shed the skin cells or replace them properly. This type will be permanent and you will have to manage it to keep your pet comfortable.

Some breeds such as American Cocker Spaniels, English Springer Spaniels, Basset Hounds, West Highland White Terriers, Dachshunds, Labrador and Golden Retrievers, and German Shepherds are more likely to have it.

Secondary seborrhea develops due to another condition affecting the skin and causing the abnormal oil production. The possible causes are many and, at times, can be difficult to discover.

Included are hormone problems especially hypothyroidism (low thyroid) in dogs and Cushing's disease, an excess of cortisone in the body. It can also be triggered by allergies, parasites, infections, a poor diet, or because a pet isn't grooming properly.

The seborrhea will go away if you can identify and correct the underlying problem. At times, though, the underlying problem cannot be eliminated, such as with allergies. In that case, you will need to treat seborrhea just as you need to do in primary cases. This will help the skin stay healthier and help your pet be more comfortable.

Treatment

The first thing to do is treat the underlying problem if there is one. Treat for parasites, infections, and hormone problems; improve the diet and add fish oil.

Recurring infections are common with seborrhea. The abnormal skin and excess oil is an ideal environment for bacteria and yeast to grow. Infections can both be a cause of seborrhea and can develop because the pet has seborrhea. Your pet may need frequent exams to check for infections and repeated treatments for them.

Shampoos and moisturizers are usually the main stay of treatment for seborrhea. Certain ingredients in medicated shampoos will help remove the oil and the flakes.



Moisturizers will control the dry forms. You may need to bathe your pet several times a week to keep it under control especially if it's the oily type.

Dogs will usually have waxy ears and are prone to ear infections. They need to have their ears cleaned regularly, which may mean daily. A good guideline is to clean the ears whenever they start to get smelly. If the odor increases or if your dog is scratching his ears more, there may be an infection. Have your veterinarian examine your dog.

If your dog does not respond to the above treatments or if you are unable to bathe your dog, drugs may be an option. Discuss this with your vet as they can have some potentially serious side effects.

Summary

Seborrhea is a skin condition that can complicate other skin problems. It can also be a signal to look for an underlying cause. Controlling seborrhea will help your pet be more comfortable and the skin will be healthier.