

DIAGNOSING SKIN DISEASES

Skin Diseases can be very complex and difficult to diagnose. That is why some doctors specialize in nothing but dermatology! The skin is the heaviest organ of the body, accounting for about 16% of the body's weight. The skin has many different functions and many different types of cells. It prevents water loss; it serves as a sensory organ; it protects the body from impact and friction injuries; it is elastic to allow for swelling; it protects against ultraviolet rays from the sun. The skin's glands, blood vessels and fatty tissue participate in thermo-regulation, metabolism and excretion. The skin is also the body's first defense against disease.

Often more than one disease process is going on at the same time to produce a skin problem. For example, allergies lead to scratching, which leads to bacterial infection, which leads to more scratching.

Some skin diseases clear up quickly and easily. Some problems clear up quickly only to recur. Some require lifetime treatment to keep under control, as they cannot be cured. In severe cases, it may take weeks or months for skin problems to improve, and many tests and rechecks may be necessary for a cure to result.

Possible causes of skin disease, and contributing factors, include:

Allergy

- to fleas
- to substances in the food the pet eats
- to inhaled substances such as mildew spores, dust mites, and pollens
- to chemicals or materials contacting the skin

Infection

- bacterial ("staph. infection", "pyoderma")
- fungal ("ringworm")
- yeast

Overly dry or oily skin (seborrhea)

Several species of parasitic mites, including mange mites

Fleas or ticks

Hormone imbalances

Immune system dysfunction

Liver disease

Cancer

The most likely possibilities in your pet have been marked. Again, there may be several things all occurring at once.

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Here are some of the tests which might be necessary to reach a diagnosis or treatment plan:

- Skin scrape to look for bacteria, yeast and/or mites
- Fungal Culture/PCR testing for ringworm
- Bacterial culture and sensitivity
- CBC and chemistry panel
- Thyroid testing
- Adrenal testing for Cushing's disease
- Skin biopsy
- Treatment trial for mites with Revolution, Nexgard or Bravecto
- Allergy testing
- Antibiotic therapy
- Medication trial for allergies
- Bathing with special shampoo/cream rinse
- Vitamin/Fatty Acid therapy
- Flea treatment
- Hypoallergenic diet trial

Just a note about hypoallergenic diet trials: There are no foods that are hypoallergenic. Dogs and cats can develop allergies to ANYTHING they ingest. In fact, the more foods you try in the early stages of food allergy, the more foods your pet is likely to become allergic to. That's why the diet trial is last on our list. **It is best to feed your pet just one kind of food during the time we are diagnosing and treating the skin problems,** to make diagnosis easier, and to shorten the list of substances your pet could become allergic to. If food allergy is a likely reason for your pet's problem we will advise you on the proper diet to try and when that should be done. Please don't experiment on your own!

At least one recheck will be needed to evaluate response to treatment. Sometimes it takes many visits. There will be an office visit and recheck examination fee with each visit.

The plan for your pet's treatment is:

Your next scheduled appointment should be in _____ days.