



Controlling Canine Skin Infection

Skin infection (pyoderma) is a very common problem in dogs. It usually involves *Staphylococcus* bacteria and is always secondary to another problem, mainly allergies and hormonal disturbances in the body. It can also occur whenever the integrity of the skin barrier is disrupted, such as during infestation with demodex mites or scratching due to fleas.

The main symptoms of pyoderma include itchiness, rash, hair loss and crusts and scaling on the body. These infections can be very frustrating as they have a high rate of recurrence. It is very important to treat the underlying problem to achieve the best chance of success. In spite of adequate treatment and attention to underlying problems, these infections may never be completely cured. Control of symptoms and itching is very attainable in most cases.

Along with a complete physical exam, it is important to rule out ringworm, mites, fleas, allergies and thyroid disease. Tests that are commonly done include fungal cultures, skin scrapings, skin cytology, thyroid testing, other blood testing and trial treatment with flea control products. Dogs may be placed on hypoallergenic diets to rule out a food allergy. In addition, a referral to a veterinary dermatologist for allergy testing may be required.

Treatment involves a minimum of 3 weeks of antibiotic therapy along with medicated baths. In many cases of recurrent pyoderma, several months of therapy may be required. Cephalexin and Clavamox are two commonly used antibiotics. Medicated baths with anti-bacterial shampoos will help control the bacterial population on the skin as well as help remove crusts and scaling. It is very important to allow the shampoo adequate contact time on the skin—at least 10 minutes after lathering. Use of cream rinses will help to restore moisture to the skin. Two baths a week will help to speed control of the infection.

It is critical to comply with progress evaluation exams at regular intervals. Stopping medication too soon will allow the infection to come back even more quickly. Antibiotic therapy should extend for at least one week past resolution of the skin rash. If despite adequate treatment the infection returns repeatedly, long-term, intermittent antibiotic therapy may be necessary, especially if the underlying problem cannot be controlled.