

Ask A Vet: Hotspot Misery

Sunday, July 3, 2016

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My dog, Scrappy, gets these terribly itchy, skin erosions this time of year every year. My vet calls them "hot spots." What are they and how can I manage them for my poor, miserable pooch?

-A concerned reader

Dear Reader,

Hot spots refer to skin erosions caused by itching. This itching may be due to insect bites, an irritating substance, allergies to food or environmental substances, parasites or secondary infections. No matter the cause of the itching, dogs and cats alike can start licking and scratching at the affected area of their skin, causing it to become irritated and inflamed. The inflammation causes more itching and the cycle continues until the area forms a large lesion that could be painful.

If the area is not too painful, you may be able to clean it at home. The hair should be clipped from the affected skin and the skin cleansed with a gentle antibacterial solution such as diluted chlorhexidine or dilute betadine. If the pet is painful, you should contact your veterinarian, as he/she will be able to sedate your pet for the cleaning and prescribe pain medications. Your veterinarian will likely prescribe a topical ointment to place on the lesion. You can easily apply this ointment at home.

You can purchase chlorhexidine or betadine antibacterial cleansers over the counter at a human pharmacy. Dilute the cleanser with 1 part cleanser to 10 parts water and gently use a gauze pad soaked in the solution to soak the lesion for 5 minutes. Rinse the area with water and carefully dry the area. Once the area is dry, apply the prescribed cream to the raw skin. It is essential that the ointment stays in contact with the skin and not be licked off by your pet. An E-collar (cone collar) may be needed if your dog is going to lick off the medication. A pet can lick or damage the skin so much that it sets back healing by days or weeks in just a few seconds. Unless constant supervision can be ensured, an E-collar is extremely important because it can prevent otherwise unnecessary return trips to the veterinarian. An E-collar provides continuous protection from chewing and licking. Although this method of protection can be awkward for some pets at first, it is a temporary measure, and most dogs and cats adjust well over time.

If your veterinarian has prescribed a spray medication, simply spray the hot spot with 1-2 pumps and distract the dog for about 10 minutes to allow the spray to soak in to the skin. You will likely need to apply the ointment/spray to the affected skin at least once daily and continue until the hot spot has healed – ask your veterinarian what they recommend.

Your veterinarian may prescribe other medications such as anti-inflammatories, or antibiotics depending on the situation. Be sure to finish the entire course of medications prescribed to your pet.

If you notice increased discharge, redness, swelling, heat or pain from the lesion, or if you notice the conditions spreading in spite of treatment, contact your local veterinarian right away.

-Dr. Ashley Vander Wey