

STAPH DERMITITIS. THAT IS REALLY BAD! RIGHT?

As concerning as it sounds, Staph Dermatitis may not be a bad thing once you understand the science. First, staph dermatitis is quite a common diagnosis, but is often a “guess” by the veterinarian versus a prognosis based on a lab test. To truly diagnose Staph Dermatitis, a culture and sensitivity test are required, because we need to know exactly what bacteria or fungus (different test) we are up against. Therefore, all too often this is an educated guess based on Staph being the most common bacteria present on the skin.

The most common Staph that we find present on the skin of dogs and cats are *Staphylococcus pseudintermedius* and *Staphylococcus schleiferi*. These are a different species than the *Staphylococcus aureus* that is more common in humans. These bacteria are considered normal flora of the skin which means they are present normally even on healthy skin. So, why did my vet say my dog has an infection if they are normal? The Staph, as well as yeast/fungus (common to the skin) are what we refer to as opportunistic organisms. This means they will tend to over-grow (cause an infection) if they are given the right conditions or environment. Instead of staph dermatitis being a disease, it is a symptom or secondary issue.

CAUSES OF SECONDARY INFECTIONS:
--

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) ALLERGIES2) TRAUMA TO THE SKIN3) MOIST ENVIRONMENT4) PARASITES5) TOXINS/IRRITANTS TO THE SKIN6) ANTIBIOTICS7) ANTI-FUNGALS8) HARSH SHAMPOOS9) DRY SKIN OR FAILURE TO CONDITION AFTER SHAMPOOING10) AUTO-IMMUNE DISEASES11) METABOLIC DISEASES12) CHANGES IN SKIN PH |
|---|

It is especially important to realize that the bacteria and fungus of the skin are in competition. If you wipe out one of these, then you get the other. Antibiotics (like penicillin) are often substances that are produced by yeast or fungi to repel or suppress bacteria. When we use antibiotics, a perfect environment is created to promote the growth of yeast and fungus. Without utilizing this science, many veterinarians/doctors will switch antibiotics if the skin does not respond without considering that we may already have a secondary yeast/fungus infection. This practice also contributes to the Staph mutating and becoming drug resistant forming MRSA (methicillin resistant Staph. aureus) or for dogs MRSP (methicillin resistant Staph pseudintermedius). We often refer to these as MRSA infections, but that is not the correct terminology referring to dogs and cats.

If we understand that bacterial and fungal infections are secondary, then that should prompt us to rethink our approach. By just treating the infection, we are merely treating a symptom, but not really addressing the true disease. Often the disease associated with skin issues can be vague and extremely hard to delineate, which is why we have so many frustrating cases. There are no precise tests to show why the skin is an issue, so commonly we are faced with the diagnosis of “sick skin with secondary infection” for lack of anything more concrete. Though this does give us an operating plan whether veterinarian or groomer. We have 2 things to accomplish. One, we need to get rid of the infection and two, we need to return the skin to health again. If antibiotics and anti-fungals can create problems, then maybe we should take a different approach. If nutrition and medication struggle to cross the watertight skin barrier, then maybe that is not the approach to use either. Instead, let us go straight to the source of the problem.... the skin.

A topical approach makes the most sense to be able to change the environment quickly, but we need to tackle it in such a way that we help fix the “sick skin”. There are several products on the market that claim to be anti-bacterial and antifungal, but the question is how they leave the skin after application. We must also realize that we will struggle if there are things occurring internally in the pet that is perpetuating the problem (veterinarian’s responsibility).

Skin is a living organism, so it needs the basics of life: food, water, protection, and oxygen. If we remove any of these or fail to replace them in the process, then the skin will struggle to heal. The disease process itself will often deplete these necessities and will require they are replaced to get back to a normal status.

The basis of shampooing (a stripping process) promotes the process of healing with the basic “solution to pollution is dilution”. By decreasing the bacteria or fungal levels, we can give the body a fighting chance. The problem with just shampooing is unless you are using an anti-fungal or antibacterial type of shampoo, its only benefit is dilution. The main reason the body has not already healed itself is because it is overwhelmed, so just diluting does not suffice.

One of the keys for success involves using a shampoo or combination of shampoos designed to suppress or kill both the bacteria and the fungus (take care of both competitors) allowing the body to catch up. Next and very importantly, we need to follow that with a conditioner that replaces those essential requirements to bring the skin back to health after the infection subsides.

It is important to remember that these types of infections do not usually occur overnight, so they will not go away overnight. Bacteria is much easier to eliminate (sometimes a couple of hours to days), but fungus on the other hand is slow to grow and slow to get rid of. They are in competition with one another, so we need to gear our restoration of the skin on a 6-8-week time frame to get rid of the fungus. Another important key to success is bathing the pet frequently enough to never allow the infection or the skin debris to return (solution to pollution) which usually means bathing them 1-2 times a week.

KEYS TO SUCCESS WITH INFECTED SKIN:
--

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) USE AN ANTI-BACTERIAL/ANTIFUNGAL SHAMPOO2) ALWAYS CONDITION WITH A HYDRATING/NUTRIENT RICH CONDITIONER3) BATHE FREQUENTLY ENOUGH TO GET AHEAD OF THE INFECTION4) REPEAT BATHS LONG ENOUGH TO ALLOW THE BODY TO HEAL5) BE QUICK TO START BACK UP OR GET ON MAINTENANCE IF NOT A 100% AFTER INITIAL RESTORATION |
|--|

Many clients, groomers, and veterinarians think there is too much involved, or it is too costly and try to short cycle the treatment process by cutting something out (conditioner, time, frequency, etc.). The results are usually the same... failure! The science is what the science is! There is a reason for the things we discussed here. By following a solid scientific protocol, we will greatly enhance the success rate. The trap that many of us fall into is after 3 weeks (solution to pollution), they look significantly better, and we quit, thinking we are done. The real proof is what happens 2 weeks to 2 months after we quit!