Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine

DOG Watch®

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Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine

INSIDE

IN THE NEWS . . .

A Generic Heartworm Preventive for Dogs

FidoPharm recently launched a generic prescription heartworm preventive called PetTrust Plus (ivermectin/pyrantel) as part of an event in New Orleans at which FidoPharm also established a "Pet Trust" for the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

PetTrust Plus is the first generic preventive to be sold in retail pharmacies, according to FidoPharm. The medication contains the same active ingredients in the same concentrations as popular brands, but can cost owners up to 50 percent less.

"Dogs deserve access to preventive heartworm medicine and their owners deserve choices, without having to sacrifice quality and efficacy," said FidoPharm President Alex Kaufman. "With the introduction of PetTrust Plus at retail pharmacies nationwide, FidoPharm continues to protect pets and provide owners with affordable and accessible pet health care options." ❖

Hip Dysplasia: A Painful Progression

Some large breed dogs are especially susceptible to this joint disease that can cause significant pain and crippling.

Hip dysplasia, a potentially crippling condition that is found most often in large-breed dogs, is marked by an abnormal formation of the hip joint. While the condition in itself is not life-threatening, it almost always results in pain and significant lameness. The disorder is marked by an inherited malformation of the ball-and-socket joint that connects an animal's thigh bone (femur) to its hip. In this case, the "ball" is the femoral head, the knobby top end of the thigh bone, while the "socket" is a cup-shaped cavity called the acetabulum that is located at the lower end of the hip bone.

In a normal animal, the femoral head fits snugly within the acetabulum but is free enough to glide and partially rotate, thereby allowing a dog to lie down, stand up, walk and break into a trot with fluid ease. But in a dog with hip dysplasia, the ball and socket are misaligned and wobbly.

This partial dislocation, called subluxation, causes the femoral head and the acetabulum to knock and grind against each other. Over time, the constant wear and tear cause the acetabulum to become shallow and the femoral head to become worn and misshapen, resulting in an incapacitating looseness of the entire joint.

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Coping With Canine Skin Allergies

A single ingredient in your dog's food or pollen in the air is often the cause. Here's what you should know.

In a healthy dog, the skin functions as a barrier against invasion by harmful microorganisms. It works as a watertight seal, retaining body fluids and preventing dehydration. The skin insulates the internal organs against the outside world's extremes of heat and cold. And it serves as a sensory surface, picking up information from the environment and relaying that information to the brain. Unfortunately, the canine skin is also subject to a wide array of disorders, most of which are readily treatable but, if ignored by a dog's owner, can become life-threatening. Among all such disorders, the most frequently observed is allergic dermatitis, an extremely itchy skin condition that is brought on by an allergic response to a foreign substance — airborne pollen, for example, or an ingredient in an animal's food.

These and other inciting agents — called allergens — cause the mast cells in a dog's skin to degranulate, a process that brings on the itching. While the itching does not, in itself, pose a serious health threat, the incessant scratching that it prompts may cause secondary skin wounds that can make an affected animal vulnerable to severe and potentially deadly bacterial infection.

Exaggerated Response. "An allergy is an exaggerated response to a stimulus, and this

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DOG Watch

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SHORT TAKES

FDA on Chicken Jerky Treats

Renewed complaints of dogs becoming ill from consuming chicken jerky treats produced in China prompted the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to release a statement of "frequently asked questions" that can be read at http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/ProductSafetyInformation/ucm295445.htm.

In September 2007, the FDA issued a cautionary warning about the products to consumers, which was followed by a "Preliminary Animal Health Notification" in December 2008. According to the agency, the number of complaints curtailed in the latter part of 2009 and for most of 2010. But in 2011, the number of complaints rose again, and the agency issued another cautionary warning. The FDA released document amid continued complaints about the jerky products — which are also sold as tenders, strips or treats.

The cause of the illnesses remains a mystery, according to the FDA. Product samples are being tested by FDA laboratories, the Veterinary Laboratory Response Network and other animal health diagnostic laboratories for multiple chemical and microbiological contaminants. Samples tested in March for toxic metals — including heavy metals — came back negative. No products have yet been recalled, and because no contaminate has been detected, the FDA said it is "limited" in what regulatory action it can take.

The agency is advising consumers who choose to feed chicken jerky products to their dogs to watch their pets closely for:

Decreased appetite;
Decreased activity;
Vomiting;
Diarrhea, sometimes with blood;
Increased water consumption; and/or
Increased urination.

Owners should contact veterinarians if the symptoms persist for more than 24 hours, the FDA said. Blood tests may indicate kidney failure (increased urea nitrogen and creatinine), and urine tests may indicate Fanconi-like syndrome (increased glucose).

Cases of animal illness should be reported to the FDA through the owner's state FDA Consumer Complaint Coordinator or electronically at http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/ReportaProblem/ucm182403.htm. Owners should also keep the jerky package and any remaining pieces for possible testing.

Arizona's First DVM Program

Midwestern University of Glendale, AZ, is establishing a college of veterinary medicine, which is scheduled to open in the fall of 2014. Midwestern will be the first school in Arizona to offer a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree, and it expects 100 students to enroll in the first year.

The university cited a shortage of veterinarians in Arizona as the reason for establishing the veterinary college. The state has one veterinarian for every 4,100 animals, according to Midwestern, trailing the national average of one veterinarian per 3,500 animals. (In fact, three Arizona counties, including Greenlee, La Paz and Yuma, have no veterinarians in practice, according to the university.)

"Quality veterinary care is an absolute necessity in our state — particularly in our farming and agricultural communities where demand is the highest and shortage of care is the most critical," said Governor Janice Brewer. "The establishment of this college will produce good jobs and help ensure that Arizona develops home-grown veterinarians to meet our most pressing animal health care needs."

The university will focus on recruiting students throughout the state and region, with particular emphasis on those from rural communities.

Popular Breeds of 2011

The Beagle and the Golden Retriever surpassed the Yorkshire Terrier among popular breeds in the United States in 2011 compared with the previous year — but the Labrador Retriever remained America's favorite, the American Kennel Club reported recently.

The Beagle was the third most popular dog breed, according to the AKC's annual registration statistics, followed by the Golden Retriever. The Yorkshire terrier, previously No. 3, was fifth most popular in 2011. ❖

PRECIOUS TIME. Veterinary hospice can focus on the quality time at the end of a beloved pet's life — for both the dog and the owner.

Veterinary Hospice: A New Choice

It's a solution that can help both your family and your chronically ill dog. Here's what you should know.

For many years, Katherine Goldberg, DVM, worked in veterinary critical and intensive care units. As she found herself becoming increasingly interested in the stories behind the emergencies, she was moved to make a difference for terminally ill pets. In 2010, she founded Whole Animal Veterinary Hospice Services, a practice whose mission is to provide "compassionate care in the comfort of your home." She now spends most of her time doing just that. We spoke with Dr. Goldberg at a recent presentation in Ithaca, NY, where her practice is based.

What exactly is veterinary hospice? The word "hospice" — which has the same root as "hospitality" — originally meant a place of shelter for weary travelers. In 1969, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying* helped jumpstart the human hospice movement, and the term "hospice" began to be used to describe specialized care for dying people. Similarly, veterinary hospice comes from a place of acceptance that additional intervention is unlikely to change the course of disease for a particular pet, and focuses on the quality, rather than the quantity, of that pet's life.

Why did you decide to specialize in veterinary hospice care? My 12-year old dog Griffy had terminal cancer. When his condition became unacceptable, I wanted to make his death as beautiful and meaningful as his life with me had been. We put wildflowers around his neck and took him out to his favorite field in his favorite season — wintertime. We sat there in the snow, fed him hamburgers, and just hugged and held him. He passed away surrounded by people who loved him.

I realized how unfair it was that I could provide this beautiful experience for my pet just because I happened to be a veterinarian. I wanted to offer people a way to do the same for their pets. Many of us have experienced a beloved pet's death in a clinical setting, like a veterinarian's office. I believe the euthanasia process can be different. Specifically, it can provide a meaningful opportunity for growth and peace of mind. I've been fortunate to practice in Ithaca, with the resources of Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine and hospital nearby.

Why seek veterinary hospice for pets? First, our pets are living longer. At some point, geriatric animals are a reality for most owners. Second, the expanded medical options now available for pets are approaching those available for humans. While this can be great for the health of our pets, it also creates a dizzying array of options. Just because we can perform a medical procedure doesn't necessarily mean we should.

In my practice, I emphasize the "worth it" meter — if a treatment disrupts the bond between dog and owner, then it's not worth it. I'm interested in that precious time between when a veterinarian says, "There's nothing more we can do" and the animal's death. Hospice can help make the most of that time.

How can hospice benefit pet owners? A veterinary hospice provider can help oversee and navigate the many decisions and challenges that come with end-of-life care. Aside from financial issues, decision-making can involve complicated ethical questions like "How do I feel about intensive veterinary care? Does this treatment make sense for my pet?" Then there are nuts-and-bolts questions like "Can caregivers manage pain control at home? How often does a veterinarian realistically need to see this patient?

Other factors include the pet's underlying medical conditions, his or her temperament, and how well-tolerated various treatments might be. Veterinary professionals are often conflicted about sending animals with real nursing care needs and medical challenges back home. All too often, people choose immediate euthanasia because they don't know of any other options.

A hospice provider can help assess quality of life, control pain, and adjust

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HELP CURB PET OVERPOPULATION. Sadly, thousands of young, unwanted dogs are euthanized each year at our local shelters.

Why Neutering Is So Important

Removal of your dog's reproductive organs will help curb overpopulation and can be a health benefit, too.

Some dog owners may harbor misgivings about neutering, the surgical removal of a male animal's testicles or a female's ovaries and uterus. But according to James Flanders, DVM, "There are no sound arguments against these procedures — only misconceptions." In fact, the earlier a dog is neutered, the better, says Dr. Flanders, an associate professor of surgery at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Flanders cites several good reasons for these procedures, chief among them the reduction of canine overpopulation — the birth of unwanted puppies that are either abandoned or relegated to overburdened animal shelters and a miserable existence that is often relieved only through euthanasia. Thousands of young, unwanted dogs are put to death each year, he observes, and the sterilization of males and females can go a long way toward alleviating this situation.

Accompanying Benefits. Moreover, he cites significant health advantages that both males and females can gain. For example, says Dr. Flanders, spaying a female puppy prior to sexual maturity and the accompanying development of mammary tissue yields a 200-fold reduction in the chance that it will get mammary cancer later on.

Other conditions that are prevented by removal of the female reproductive organs include: pyometra, a life-threatening disorder marked by the accumulation of pus in the uterus; vaginal hyperplasia, a gross swelling of the vaginal wall that occurs during the normal heat cycle; uterine torsion, a twisting of the uterus that may occur late in pregnancy; uterine prolapse, the bulging of the uterus into the vaginal tract; and a variety of infections, cysts and cancers of the uterus.

Males stand to benefit in several respects from the removal of their testicles, especially when the procedure is done at an early age. "As intact male dogs grow older," Dr. Flanders points out, "they are very likely to have problems associated with the prostate gland. When they reach the age of eight, nine or 10, it's quite possible for the gland to become enlarged."

This condition — called benign prostatic hypertrophy — is very common, he says, and removal of the testicles will almost certainly prevent its occurrence in older dogs. The same holds true for less common but more severe prostate problems such as prostatic cancer and serious infections of the gland, which can have fatal consequences. And, of course, castration also rules out the possibility of testicular cancer.

According to Dr. Flanders, there is no evidence that male or female neutering at an early age is detrimental to a dog's long-term health. At the same time, he says that dogs of any age — with the exception, perhaps, of those with severe cardiac problems that might foster adverse reactions to anesthesia — can safely undergo these operations.

Spaying of Females. Spaying is typically done when a dog is between four and six months of age, Dr. Flanders points out, although many shelters are now performing the procedure in females as young as eight or 10 weeks. In any case, he recommends that the procedure — also known as ovariohysterectomy — is best performed when a female is no older than six months of age or so, before it has experienced its first estrus (the periodic state of sexual excitability, immediately preceding ovulation, when a female is most receptive to mating).

Upon admission to the clinic, explains Dr. Flanders, the dog is given a subcutaneous injection of a mild sedative to calm it, after which the animal is put under general anesthesia. The animal's abdomen is then shaved and scrubbed, and the surgery commences with the surgeon, using a scalpel blade, making an incision through the skin, subcutaneous tissues and abdominal wall. "Then," says Dr. Flanders, "it's a matter of finding the reproductive tract, which is usually pretty easy for an experienced surgeon."

One by one, the two ovaries are tied off (ligated) from their blood supply and cut loose from adjoining tissue. "What we have then," says Dr. Flanders, "are the ovaries attached only to the uterine body." The blood supply to the uterus is then ligated, and the organs are taken from the animal's abdomen.

After the uterus and ovaries are removed, all of the ligatures are carefully examined to make sure that they are secure and that no internal bleeding is taking place. The incisions in the abdominal wall and subcutaneous tissues are then sewn shut with dissolvable sutures, and the outer incision is closed with stitches that will have to be removed after about 10 days.

In almost all cases, the procedure, he notes, is safe and brief — taking between 20 and 40 minutes to complete. If the spaying is done in the morning, the patient may be ready to go home by evening (although an overnight stay may be preferable in some cases), and full recovery can be expected within two weeks or so. According to Dr. Flanders, the cost of the procedure varies considerably across the U.S., ranging between $100 and $500, depending on such factors as a veterinary clinic's size and geographic location.

Castration of Males. The surgical removal of a male dog's testicles is speedy, relatively simple and generally safe. The procedure can be performed on any male that is eight weeks of age or older, although, says Dr. Flanders, "We tend to do the surgery at 10 to 12 weeks of age."

If the testicles are positioned normally, he says, a single incision is made immediately above and in front of the scrotum. Both testicles are then withdrawn through the single incision, the spermatic cord is ligated and the incision is closed up with absorbable sutures.

In a small minority of cases, the testicles will not be in their normal position and the surgeon will have to find them by palpating the abdominal area. "In some cases," says Dr. Flanders, "an undescended testicle will have moved out of the abdomen but won't have reached the scrotum. So to get to it, we have to make an incision near the scrotum at the point where it seems to be located. And in some cases, the testicles are still in the abdomen and we'll have to go in and get them."

In most cases, a dog will enter the clinic early in the morning, the procedure will be completed before noon, and the patient will be in good shape to go home that same evening. The cost of a routine castration typically ranges between $75 and $300.

At home, says Dr. Flanders, the animal should remain quiet for a week or so, and it should not be allowed to lick or chew at the incision. ("An Elizabethan collar may be needed to prevent that," he notes.) Contrary to a widespread misconception, a castrated dog will not display a change in activity level or appetite after the operation. And it will not gain weight as a consequence of the procedure. Although the animal's sex drive is bound to diminish, it may continue to instinctively mount female dogs that are in heat. ❖

VETERINARY HOSPICE ... *(continued from page 3)*

medications according to the health condition. We can offer mental and appetite stimulation, enhance mobility, and when appropriate, provide a meaningful euthanasia experience. Hospice care incorporates a global look at each animal's situation, and a deep respect for the pet/owner bond. Often this involves sifting through piles of medical records, determining what the caregivers want, and what the patient needs. I have immense respect for the relationships that people have with their regular veterinarians, and for the specialists that provide cutting-edge care.

MORE INFORMATION

Veterinary Hospice Literature:

Kindred Spirit, Kindred Care: Making Health Decisions On Behalf of Our Animal Companions, *by Shannon Fujimoto Nakaya.*

Canine and Feline Geriatric Oncology: Honoring the Human-Animal Bond, *by Alice Villalobos.*

Veterinary Hospice Providers:

Whole Animal Veterinary Hospice Services (www.wholeanimalvet.com) reviews records and provides consultations for clients both near and far, often in conjunction with primary care veterinarians. In-home consultations are available for local clients. Ithaca, NY, 14853. Phone: 607-273-2200.

Pawspice (www.pawspice.com), an end-of-life pet hospice care program founded by Alice Villalobos, DVM, provides palliative and nutritional care for terminal pets. P.O. Box 332, Hermosa Beach, CA, 90254. Phone: 562-493-5025.

Kindred Spirit Kindred Care, LLC (www.kindredspiritkindredcare.com), founded by Shannon Fujimoto Nakaya, DVM, provides home-based integrative veterinary care for pets with special needs. P.O. Box 4955, Kailua Kona, HI, 96745. Phone: 808-896-1543.

I advocate for a team approach where all parties work together to create a continuum of thorough, individualized, dignified end-of-life care. Pet owners benefit most when they are part of that decision-making and caregiving team. It makes it all worthwhile when a client thanks me for advocating for their pet's welfare, and for their beliefs, expectations and goals."

When should pet owners seek hospice care? You may be ready to seek hospice care if or when additional medical intervention is intolerable for you or your pet; when your animal's quality of life has declined to a point that is unacceptable for either of you; when the pain cannot be adequately managed; and when you as a caregiver need support. Some people simply need more consultation time than the traditional model of veterinary care allows. And some veterinarians feel out of their comfort zone with these issues and are happy to be able to offer their clients a referral.

When might a cat be ready for hospice care? Conditions that may be appropriate for hospice care include cancer, organ failure or the end stage of any disease. Geriatric pets with multiple non-terminal issues, such as mobility and cognition, may also benefit from hospice care. Think about what constitutes a good day for your animal, and what he or she needs to be happy. When those things are no longer possible, hospice care can be beneficial. Finally, think about how you'd most like to say goodbye to your dog. Veterinary hospice can help your vision happen. ❖

HIP DYSPLASIA ...

(continued from cover)

The trauma will eventually lead to degenerative joint disease, or osteoarthritis, a condition characterized by the gradual destruction of cartilage, the rubbery tissue that protects and cushions the bone ends. Changes in other tissues of the hip joint also occur.

The Weight Factor. Hip dysplasia affects dogs of both genders about equally, and the major risk factor appears to be size, notes George Lust, PhD, a professor of physiological chemistry at the Baker Institute for Animal Health, a unit of Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. "Studies have suggested," he points out, "that between 35 and 40 percent of some large breeds — German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers, Rottweilers, and Standard Poodles, for example — that weigh more than 40 or 50 pounds have hip dysplasia. At the same time, several large breeds — Borzois, Great Danes, Greyhounds, Doberman Pinschers, Siberian Huskies and Irish Wolfhounds, for example — actually have a low incidence of the disorder."

Many reports in scientific journals have definitively established that hip dysplasia is passed down genetically from one generation of dogs to the next. However, it is difficult to predict which animals will be affected and which will not be, since researchers have yet to identify the combination of genes involved. To complicate matters further, even offspring of two unaffected parents can develop hip dysplasia. Indeed, says Dr. Lust, the condition can occur in up to 25 percent of dogs born to apparently normal parents.

Conclusive Diagnosis. Although an owner can certainly suspect that a dog is suffering from hip dysplasia, conclusive diagnosis can only be achieved by means of physical manipulation, radiographic examination (X-ray images) and thorough orthopedic examination. According to Dr. Lust, there are three radiographic procedures that are currently used in the U.S. to diagnose the condition. All are performed with anesthesia.

◆ *The extended hip radiograph analysis uses X-ray pictures to provide definitive hip evaluations in dogs two years of age or older that are showing signs of osteoarthritis within the joint.* However, this procedure is not accurate in younger dogs, because not all of the signs of hip joint abnormality are apparent until an animal is at least two years old.

◆ *The PennHip method uses X-ray images of a hip joint in which the acetabulum and femoral head have been separated to an extent by placing a bar called a detractor between the dog's thighs and pushing inward on the stifles, or knees.* In a dog with hip dysplasia, the femoral head will pop readily out of the socket. If it doesn't pop out, it is clear that the joint is appropriately tight and therefore not dysplastic.

◆ *The dorsolateral subluxation (DSL) test — which was developed at Cornell — uses X-ray images of a dog's hips that are taken while the animal is suspended in a hammock-like support with its legs extended downward in a kneeling position.* In the other two tests, the dog is lying on its back on a table during the procedure, with its legs in positions that induce abnormal joint stresses.

"The DSL test shows the amount of looseness or displacement in the hip that is occurring under normal functional conditions," notes Dr. Lust. "This test has proven to be partially accurate at diagnosing the condition as early as four months of age and very accurate at eight months." Both the PennHip method and the DSL test, he adds, are particularly effective in identifying young dogs that are dysplasia-free.

Easing the Pressure. Surgical treatment for hip dysplasia is available, with options including total hip replacement, a procedure in which the femoral head and acetabulum are replaced with a prosthesis. For most owners, however, Dr. Lust contends that palliative care will be the sole practical approach to treating this incurable condition. And in that regard, early diagnosis is important. "The sooner you spot it," he says, "the sooner you can try therapy. The most effective approach is weight control early in a dog's life as a means of taking as much pressure off the animal's limbs."

Dr. Lust urges owners — especially those of large-breed dogs — to be aware of the classic signs of hip dysplasia and the need for veterinary assessment. He also urges owners who want to breed their dogs to breed only those that are unaffected by hip dysplasia and to refrain from breeding any animal that has been diagnosed with the condition. "It's well established," he says, "that 50 to 75 percent of dogs with the disorder will produce offspring with this condition." ❖

A PAINFUL PROGRESSION ...

According to Dr. George Lust, the earliest signs of hip dysplasia typically begin to manifest themselves when a puppy is between three and eight months old. In some dogs, the signs may be almost unnoticeable. In others, the condition may already be advanced by the time it is conclusively diagnosed.

Young dogs with hip dysplasia may have a wobbling, waddling, unsteady gait. They may try to draw their hind legs forward in order to put more weight on their forelimbs. When they run, they often move their hind legs together clumsily. They may show reluctance to indulge in strenuous exercise. If they do run for a while, they are likely to exhibit soreness afterward. Dogs with hip dysplasia will also have difficulty going up and down stairs, and they will struggle to lie down and to rise up on all fours after resting.

Over anywhere from a few months to several years, the poor fit between femoral head and acetabulum will cause increased joint damage, inflammation and pain. The volume of lubricating fluid in the joint increases, the normally taut ligament that binds the femoral head to the acetabulum loosens, and the protective capsule that encases the joint becomes progressively thickened and inflamed. Meanwhile, the muscles in the hip region become weaker and reduced in size.

Keep in mind that most— but not all — large-breed dogs are at elevated risk for hip dysplasia. Diagnostic methods are now available for identifying the disorder at an early stage, and weight control may ease the pain resulting from joint malformation.

SKIN ALLERGIES ...

(continued from cover)

overreaction can manifest itself in an animal's skin," explains William Miller, Jr., VMD, a professor of dermatology at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine and editor-in-chief of *DogWatch*. "All dogs can be affected to some extent by flea bites, for example, but an allergic dog will react with disproportionate severity. Where it would take dozens of flea bites to significantly harm a normal dog's skin, the same amount of damage to an allergic dog's skin can result from relatively few bites."

This hypersensitivity is a physiological aberration whereby a dog's immune system mistakenly perceives a nontoxic substance that has entered its body as being harmful. In an effort to combat the allergen, the animal's immune system releases a substance called histamine, a process that is accompanied by inflammation and results in the development of skin eruptions. In short, says Dr. Miller, "The dog's body tries to reject the allergen, and the skin is accidentally damaged in the process."

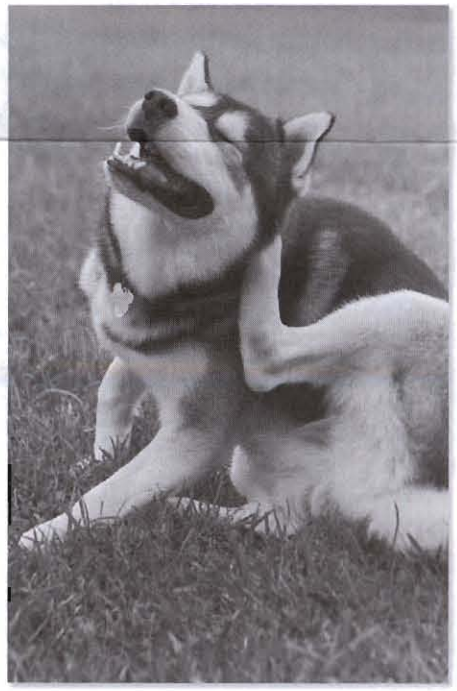
Allergens that result in skin trauma can enter a dog's body in several different ways. What Dr. Miller refers to as "the routes of inoculation" include: injection, in which the saliva of a flea or other parasite makes its way into the animal's system; ingestion, in which the animal's food or medication contains a substance that fosters the allergic response; inhalation, in which an animal inhales airborne mold spores or pollen to which it is allergic; and contact, in which the allergen enters the body through the skin.

Common Allergens. Until a decade or so ago, says Dr. Miller, parasitic inoculation by fleas, mosquitoes, spiders, wasps and yellow jackets was by far the most common cause of canine skin allergies, with fleas being the primary cuase. Fortunately, the occurrence of parasite-caused skin allergies has plummeted during recent years, thanks primarily to the development of effective products designed to counter flea infestation. "Some of these products contain flea preventives that circulate in the blood," he explains, "while others sort of wrap the animal in an insecticide." According to Dr. Miller, if you use one of these products conscientiously — beginning in the spring of the year and continuing into the fall before cold weather sets in, your dog is very likely to remain free of fleas. "Since these products have become available," he notes, "the frequency of flea allergies has declined tremendously."

He advises, however, that dog owners who also have a cat in the house must be very cautious about which flea-prevention product they use. "You have to be careful to read the label," he says, "since some of these substances are fine for dogs, but they can be toxic to cats. In fact, if you put the medication on a dog and let a cat lick it off, it can kill the cat."

Currently, he says, the most frequent causes of canine skin allergies are environmental particles — pollen, mold spores, dust and dust mites — with food ingredients ranking second. "Parasitic allergies have been pretty well taken care of with the new flea-preventive medications," says Dr. Miller, "and drug allergies are very, very uncommon." While dogs can also have allergic reactions to hormones, bacteria and fungi, he adds, such cases are "few and far between."

The clinical signs associated with allergies to parasites and drugs are more varied and complex than those associated with pollens and food allergies, although all of these types of allergy are likely to involve severe itching. For example, says Dr. Miller, parasite and drug allergies are likely to manifest themselves initially by a widespread rash, which the affected dog exacerbates by scratching. In pollen and food allergies, the itching and scratching tend to precede the appearance of a rash. In trying to diagnose a skin problem, he notes, veterinarians often ask themselves: "Is it an itch that rashes — or a rash that itches?"



Preventive Measures. Preventing the occurrence of an allergic reaction to drugs or fleas, he observes, is relatively straightforward: Keep the animal away from any medications that have been shown to provoke an allergic skin reaction and use an available flea-prevention product as directed.

Preventing exposure to airborne allergens and allergy-causing food is more complicated. "There's nothing you can do to eliminate environmental allergens," he says, "although you can minimize your dog's exposure to them. If the animal is known to be allergic to ragweed, for instance, you wouldn't let it run around in a field full of it. But the pollens are going to blow into your yard from a distant site anyway, so all you can do is keep the surface of your dog's skin as clean as possible and be sure that you don't track the pollen indoors yourself." And consult your veterinarian about medications such as antihistamines and steroids, which may be able to control the signs of such an allergy.

Regarding a suspected food allergy, the challenge is to identify the specific ingredient in your dog's diet that is causing the skin irritation. This may be accomplished by means of a so-called novel diet, which is based on the well-established fact that most canine food allergies are traceable to the protein content of an affected dog's normal diet.

In the first phase of the diet, the dog is fed food that contains none of the protein ingredients that it is used to consuming, such as beef, pork, lamb or chicken. In most cases, the dog's allergic signs will gradually disappear while it is on this novel diet. When it is completely free of its skin eruptions and is no longer scratching itself, the proteins are reintroduced to the diet in small quantities, one by one.

If the itching and scratching recur after reintroducing one of the protein ingredients, it is likely that you have identified the specific source of your dog's allergy and the cause of the irritating skin condition. ❖

William H. Miller, VMD, Diplomate, American College of Veterinary Dermatology

Send your behavior or health questions to:

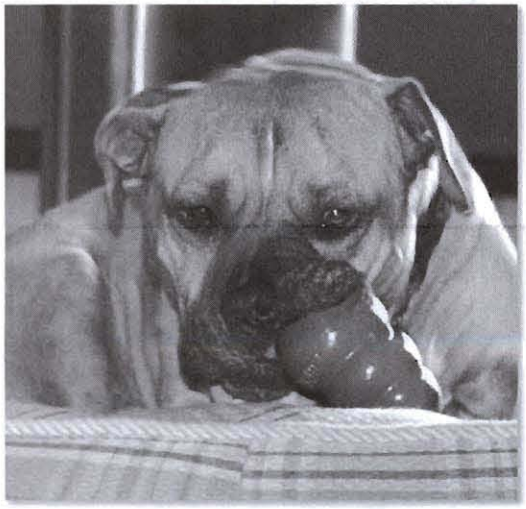
Dr. Miller, Box 7, Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, Ithaca, New York 14854

We regret that we cannot respond to individual inquiries about canine health or behavior matters.

Q *I recently adopted a beautiful Golden Retriever from the Humane Society. He is five years old, and I have become very attached to him. Unfortunately, he is not housebroken. I believe he had been an outdoor dog and had not been well cared for. Now, he occasionally will eliminate inside, but not regularly. Another problem is that he constantly chews the stuffing out of all his toys, and I have to throw them away. Is there any way to correct these problems?*

A From your description, it appears that you are concerned about two behavioral problems in your much loved Golden Retriever — inappropriate elimination in the house and chewing the stuffing out of toys. As you say, it will be difficult to give you any specific advice without a more thorough history of these behaviors and the circumstances under which they occur; however, we do have some general suggestions that may start you on the right track.

The key to housetraining a dog is to reward him for eliminating in appropriate places (e.g. the yard) and to minimize the opportunity for him to make mistakes inside. Keep him on a leash or tethered in the room where you are so he will be reluctant to urinate or defecate in the small area around himself and so you learn his signal for "I need to eliminate soon."



SATISFY HIS NEED TO CHEW. A Kong toy is a durable choice to provide for your dog.

Some dogs circle and sniff while others walk with their hind legs far apart. Most dogs signal urination differently from defecation and not as obviously.

Be sure that you take him outside frequently (every two hours at first) and especially at times when he is more likely to eliminate, such as after a meal, waking from a nap or after a play session. Whenever your dog eliminates in the appropriate place, be sure to reward him with praise and his favorite treat. If you catch your dog eliminating inside, interrupt his activity by clapping or startling him in some other way, and then quickly take him outside where he can finish what he had started.

Be sure not to punish the dog for his accidents or he might learn that he gets punished for eliminating in your presence, not that he gets punished for eliminating inside — and he may even become reluctant to eliminate outside if you are with him. To further minimize the risk of an accident, consider crate-training him. If you use a crate, be sure to take him for long walks and have play sessions so he gets ample exercise. Take him outside every two hours for a week, then every three hours, etc., until he can wait for six hours between trips outside.

Chewing is a very normal behavior for dogs; provided that he is not chewing on furniture, electrical cords, shoes or other inappropriate items, there is no reason to prevent it. However, I can understand your frustration at having to buy new toys continually. Many dogs tear soft toys apart, so he should not be given those. Following are a few suggestions for items you can give your dog to chew:

- Large, safe, real bones (large beef shinbones can keep some dogs entertained for days);
- Pigs' ears or rawhides, if they do not upset his stomach;
- Kong toys;
- Nylabones;
- Durable rubber balls;
- Large, plastic, food-dispensing toys like the Bustercube.

Hopefully your wonderful dog will benefit from these suggestions. ❖

COMING UP ...

CUSHING'S DISEASE

❖

FINDING A GOOD DOG WALKER

❖

ADDISON'S DISEASE

❖

HEALTHY TREATS

❖

SEPARATION ANXIETY

❖

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