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Dog and small animals vet



Dr Adam Gordon – Maroubra Veterinary Hospital

Adam Gordon graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. He completed a Masters degree in Veterinary Studies at Murdoch University in 2002. Adam has been in companion animal practice since 1990 and is principal of Maroubra Veterinary Hospital.

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Summer Itch

Now that warmer weather is upon us, many of us dog owners will again be dealing with the scourge that is "summer itch". Summer itch, whilst a popular term, is not a discrete disease in itself. The term refers to allergic skin disease that tends to occur in the warmer months of the year.

There are two conditions that are likely to be responsible for this problem. The first, and most common is flea allergy dermatitis. The second is a disease called atopic dermatitis.

The skin changes seen with allergic skin disease are the same irrespective of what is causing the allergy. Changes typically seen include redness, crusts or scabs and hair loss due to scratching and biting of the itchy areas. Different areas of the body are usually affected depending on the type of allergy.

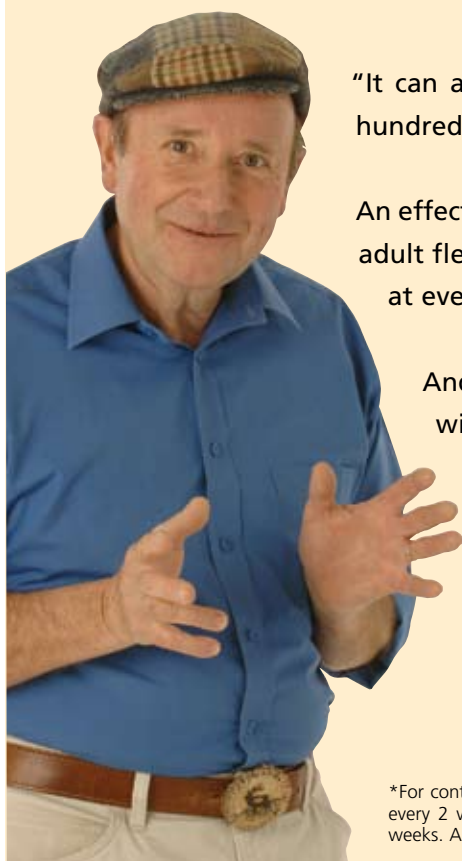
The diagnosis of flea allergy dermatitis (FAD) is usually quite straightforward, as there will usually be evidence of fleas on the dog. If there are no live fleas, the presence of flea dirt (the droppings of the flea) will alert us to the fact that fleas have been on the dog. Your veterinarian will be able to show you how to detect flea dirt.

The most commonly affected areas of the skin with FAD are the lower back, base of the tail and the insides and back of the hind limbs. The skin changes seen with FAD are due to an allergic reaction to the saliva of the flea. Not all dogs with fleas will have this allergic reaction.

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References: 1. Young, D.R., Jeannin, P.C. and Boeckh, A. (2004) Efficacy of fipronil(S)-methoprene combination spot-on for dogs against shed eggs, emerging and existing adult cat fleas (*Ctenocephalides felis*, Bouché) *Vet Parasitol* 125:397-407. 2. Jeannin, P.C., Green, S.E., Boeckh, A. and Soll, M. (2003) Efficacy of FRONTLINE Plus (fipronil(S)-methoprene) for cats against developing stages and adult fleas (*C. felis*) *Proc 19th Int Conf of the World Assoc for the Adv of Vet Parasitol*. Merial Australia Pty Ltd, Level 6, 79 George Street, Parramatta NSW 2150. (ABN 53 071 187 285) @FRONTLINE and FRONTLINE PLUS are registered trademarks of Merial. ©2007 Merial Limited. All rights reserved. FRLN-07-048. H&T MCA0137/UA

Fortunately, flea allergy is manageable by removing the source of the allergy. That means eliminating fleas from the environment. There are several very good products available from your vet that will achieve this. It is imperative that you speak with your veterinarian or veterinary nurse so that they can advise you on implementing an effective flea control program.

Atopic dermatitis, like flea allergy, causes intense itch, skin redness, crusting and hair loss. The main difference is in the parts of the body affected. The areas commonly affected with atopic dermatitis are the feet, face, ears and underside of the body.

The cause of the allergic reaction includes pollens, grasses, moulds and dust mites. These are referred to as aeroallergens, as they may be airborne, and gain access to the body through the skin. The difficulty we have in managing this type of allergy is that it is often impossible to prevent exposure to the offending allergens.

Atopic dermatitis usually starts when the dog is between 1 and 3 years of age, and is a life long disease. As there is no cure, a multi-faceted approach to management will be needed to give the affected dog the best quality of life possible.

Ideally, the dog with atopic dermatitis should have intradermal skin testing performed. This involves injecting substances that usually cause allergies into the skin and observing to see if a reaction occurs. This test serves two purposes. By identifying what the dog is allergic to, some attempt can be made to minimise exposure to the offending substances. Secondly, it will allow us to perform an important part of the treatment for atopic dermatitis to be performed, namely immunotherapy.

Immunotherapy, or hyposensitisation, involves injecting the allergic dog with small quantities of the offending substance in an attempt to stop the immune system from reacting. The injections are given weekly initially and can be given by the owner at home.

Unfortunately not all dogs improve with immunotherapy, necessitating the use of other treatments. Typically a combination of treatments will give the best control of the disease. These include:

- **Corticosteroids (cortisone, prednisolone):** These drugs are very effective at reducing the itch, but will cause side effects if used for long periods of time. To minimise side effects they are used for short-term treatment or on an alternate day basis.
- **Antihistamines:** These can be effective in some dogs. It may be necessary to try a number of different antihistamines to find one that works.
- **Essential Fatty Acids:** Have an anti-inflammatory action and increase the effectiveness of antihistamines.
- **Antibiotics and antifungals:** It is very common for dogs with atopic dermatitis to get secondary bacterial and yeast infections. They must be controlled to get good management of the allergy.
- **Topical treatment:** Correct use of appropriate shampoos and lotions can be very helpful in the management of atopic dermatitis. This often will allow less reliance on oral medications that are more expensive and may have side effects.
- **Cyclosporine:** This is a relatively recent addition to the list of drugs used to treat atopic dermatitis. It has been used in people for several years to help prevent organ transplant rejection. It has proven to be extremely effective in the treatment of atopic dermatitis, with fewer side effects than corticosteroids with long term use.

Allergic dermatitis, whatever the cause, can be an extremely frustrating problem for the pet owner to deal with. Effective management requires acceptance that it is a life long problem that will require extra care from the pet owner, as well as a willingness on the owner's part to work with their veterinarian to manage the problem. Several months may be required to achieve good management of the problem.

Cat vet

Kidney Disease in Cats



Melissa Catt BVSc – Paddington Cat Hospital

Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

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Kidney disease is one of the most common diseases diagnosed in cats, particularly in the mature age bracket. In fact it is estimated that 50% of cats over 10 years of age have some degree of kidney disease. It is something that we tend to diagnose more in warmer weather, as the body isn't able to cope as well in these conditions and the signs become more obvious.

Kidneys are made of thousands of little pumps called nephrons and cats have about half the number of nephrons than most other species (for example dogs). Perhaps this is why kidney disease is so common in older cats. The kidney is unable to produce more nephrons, so every time it loses one that means more work load on the pumps that are remaining.

Kidneys have various roles but one of their most important roles is to conserve water, ie hold water in the body. When kidneys aren't working so well, excess water is lost so the cat will urinate more. To replace this water, the cat will then drink more. Initially, these changes are very subtle and even keen observers can't see the change in their cat's drinking or urinating. The clinical result of this is dehydration that can be picked up with blood and urine tests.....even before the cat's owner has noticed any change!

Kidney disease can have specific causes such infections, cancers or genetic problems like polycystic kidney disease, but in most cases, no specific cause can be found even with thorough investigations and tests. If your veterinarian suspects an underlying disease process, they may recommend further testing like ultrasound, as this will help with treatment and the prognosis.

Fortunately, kidney disease progresses slowly in most cases. Specific diets for cats with kidney disease help slow the progression. These are prescription diets only available from your vet. It can be dangerous if the wrong prescription diet is used, which is why it is veterinarian only, and why the vet will require a script or history from the diagnosing vet if you would like to buy them from another vet's practice. We generally recommend trying to encourage your cat to have as much tinned food as possible as this provides them with more water. Some cats will accept water added to their dry food. You may need to gradually add the special diet food to their normal food to get them used to it slowly, but despite this there are some fusspots who never really eat the special diets. It is important to have multiple sources of fresh water available. Cats can be rather particular about where their water comes from, for example wanting to drink out of ceramic or glass, or from a running water source (there are water fountains available for these fussy pussies!), so please make sure you take this into account.

We can slow down the disease process even further if we can pick up side effects before they cause more damage to the kidney. Some of these side effects are:

1. **High blood pressure (hypertension):** this occurs in approximately 25% of cats with kidney disease. Measuring blood pressure of cats is done in much the same way that your blood pressure is tested, with a small paediatric sized cuff to place around a leg or tail and pump up. As their blood vessels are too small for us to hear with a stethoscope the way it's done in humans, we place a small monitor against the skin and listen to the pulse through an amplifier- this means you can hear the pulse as

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well! High blood pressure can lead to many serious consequences, such as sudden blindness, strokes or heart disease, plus it speeds up the rate of deterioration of the kidneys. Once hypertension is diagnosed, it will usually require medical management and periodic monitoring. In most cases, blood pressure control is straightforward with once daily medication (often taken readily in the food), and they need to be on it for life.

2. Low blood Potassium: this is measured by blood tests. The nephrons normally reabsorb the potassium back into the body, so with less pumps working, more potassium gets lost through the urine. Potassium lowering can lead to the blood stream becoming acidic and consequently further damage to the kidneys. It also has important functions in the muscles and low potassium can lead to general weakness. This is also managed by regular medications.

3. High blood Phosphate: Phosphate is normally excreted by the kidneys, but renal disease can cause an increase in the blood phosphate levels. This generally tends to occur later on in the disease process. It is usually controlled by renal diets but if your cat just will not eat the specific diets or this rises despite them, an additional powder or paste can be given.

4. Protein loss in the urine: is relatively rare but can be controlled with medication. It should be specifically diagnosed with an additional test before medication is given.

5. Urinary Tract Infections: are more likely to occur when urine is dilute (concentrated urine kills the bacteria). This not only causes more long term damage to the kidneys but also is uncomfortable! It is ideal to have the infection confirmed and have a test done to check which antibiotics are effective. Usually a three week course of antibiotics is recommended.

6. High blood levels of urea or creatinine: These are our main measures of dehydration in cats with (and without!) kidney disease. As the blood levels of urea rise, the cat can feel nauseous. We teach very dedicated owners how to give fluids under the skin daily. Sometimes, it's appropriate for the cat to be hospitalised to have intravenous fluids (a drip).

Testing these parameters is ideally done every three months (and less often if the disease is in very early stages). By diagnosing kidney disease early and testing regularly, we aim to increase not only the quantity of life, but more importantly, the quality of life of your cat!

Bird and exotics vet

Bird Cage Toys and Accessories What's Safe and What's Not?

We all want the best for our birds—we want them to enjoy themselves, and have interesting toys and accessories with which to play, explore and interact.

However, not all toys and cage accessories are safe, even those sold as toys specifically for birds. The following lists some commonly used toys and describes potential dangers associated with their use.

Soft toys and accessories

Rope toys with long tassels are fun for birds. They brighten up the cage and the birds like to groom and chew on the long tassels that hang down. Unfortunately over the past two years we have seen over twenty cases of birds that have eaten or chewed on these tassels, swallowing fibers causing blockages in their ventriculus (stomach) or crop (throat pouch). These birds often need surgery and some die. The birds I have seen most affected by this are cockatiels and lorikeets but many other bird species are also affected. Rope perches seem to lead to a similar problem. This is unfortunate as rope perches are nice and soft on the feet, and are often recommended for birds. But due to the increasing cases of blockage with these rope perch fibers, leading to similar signs as with rope toys, I am now reluctant to recommend them for use in cages.

The other fibrous cage accessory is the snuggly. These are tents or soft toys that the birds, especially lorikeets and conures, love to be around. They have two problems. The first is that many birds become protective of these accessories and attack anyone who comes near their cage. The second is that the snugglies also lead to the blockages in the ventriculus similar to that of rope perches. Most of these birds will die despite veterinary treatment.

Metal toys

Heavy metal poisoning is one of the most common problems I see at our bird and exotics clinic. It is usually caused by lead, zinc or copper poisoning.

Bells and metal chains are loved by many birds. They love to swing on them and play with them. The galvanized and copper bells and chains are toxic if the birds lick or chew them. This becomes a particular problem when the items rust as it becomes easier for the birds to chew off the oxidized metal. I normally recommend against metal toys, but if they must be used, make sure they are non-toxic and changed prior to them showing any signs of rust.

Metal keys are also a problem. Many of them are made with a mixture of metals that—like the bells—are often unsafe.

The situation is similar with painted toys. If lead, zinc or copper are used in the paint, the birds will often pick the paint off and be poisoned. Unfortunately most parrots seem to find these toxins quite tasty. This is especially the case with lead, and so the birds continue to pick at the toxic metal area. Many newer toys are wood painted with vegetable dyes. Providing the wood has had no chemical treatment, these toys are generally safer.

Mirrors are generally okay but the old fashioned mirrors with lead edges are poisonous.



**Dr Alex Rosenwax – BVSC MACVSc (Avian Health)
Bird & Exotics Veterinarian, Green Square.**

Alex graduated from the University of Sydney in 1991. He achieved Membership of the Avian Health Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in 1996. In November 1996 he opened the first and only Sydney all bird and exotic pet practice. The Clinic moved to 1 Hunter St Waterloo in 2003 and sees approximately 80% birds, and 20% fish, reptiles and other exotic pets. Alex is the current president of the Australian Veterinary Association Avian Group.

**Shop 3, Block D, 1 Hunter St Waterloo, Sydney 2017
Ph: (02) 9319 6111 <http://www.birdvet.com.au>**



Plastic toys and accessories

Many of our bird owners are worried about plastic. This is usually unfounded as most unpainted hard plastic is usually non-toxic. This means that most hard plastic ladders and balls are fine to use in cages. The problems come if the plastic toys such as balls have metal bells inside. Many parrots will eventually split the plastic ball open and chew on the metal insert. Plastic milk container tops are also usually safe and many birds love to play with them. Often a bird owner has concerns that the broken up plastic, after their bird has chewed up the toys, is unsafe and can cause stomach or intestinal blockage. This is very rarely the case but if you are concerned, remove these plastic toys from the cage.

Wooden and paper toys and accessories

Wooden toys coloured with vegetable dyes are very commonly sold. These are generally safe. Most bird owners complain that their birds chew them up and “ruin” them too easily. However, this is exactly what most parrots, from budgies up to cockatoos, love to do for fun. They actually see these as proper toys and their play involves shredding them. Other concerns from owners are that when the birds chew up the wooden toy they may get splinters or blockages from the wood. This does happen but is quite rare compared to rope toys causing stomach and crop blockages. Be careful not to use any wooden toys or accessories that are too fibrous, such as coconut shells or wood shavings, as I have seen some crop and stomach blockages with these. Most of our new home furniture and cupboards are made of MDF (compressed wood chips). These usually have glue, solvents and other additives so are best not given to birds as toys. Be careful also not to offer toys made out of treated wood such as treated pine as this can be toxic.

Unscented paper towels and toilet rolls are fun toys for birds to play with and chew to pieces. They may be messy but they are generally non-toxic.

Natural toys and accessories

Banksia, eucalyptus, acacia, grevillea, mallee, casuarina, malaleuca and hakia are all groups of plants your bird will enjoy. In fact, you can give your bird a huge variety of Australian plants and blossoms. Most parrots, and especially budgies, cockatiels and the cockatoo species such as sulfur-crested cockatoos and galahs, love to graze on grass, particularly young fresh grass roots. Pull up some fresh grass each day for them to enjoy. Always rinse the grass with water and avoid areas that have been sprayed with pesticides. These natural and native plants are actually what most birds love to play with and are really the true toys of birds.

So, as a general rule, stick to hard thick plastics, non-toxic wooden toys and natural wooden plant toys. Steer away from most metal toys and most soft fibrous toys and accessories. Allow your bird plenty of opportunity to explore new toys and change them frequently so they don't become bored. Often it is a good idea to hide their favourite food in these toys so they have to forage through the toy or accessory in order work out how to open them to receive their prize. This is really what birds love to do and spend all day doing in the wild.