

## Pruritus - Itching and Scratching in Dogs

### What is pruritus?

Pruritus is the medical term for itching. It is common in many types of skin disorders. Itching and scratching are commonly associated with flea allergy dermatitis and other allergic skin diseases.

### Is it common?

Pruritus is a common clinical sign of many skin disorders. It is often accompanied by red, inflamed areas of skin and may lead to skin infection called *pyoderma*.

### What causes pruritus?

Pruritus due to skin disease is one of the most common reasons dog owners seek veterinary care. Flea allergy dermatitis, seasonal allergies or atopy, food allergies, contact dermatitis and sarcoptic mange are some of the most common causes of pruritus in dogs.



### How can the itching be stopped?

The treatment of skin disease can be challenging and frustrating both for owners and veterinarians. In order to diagnose the specific cause of itching in your pet, several tests and treatments may be necessary. In some cases, this process may take weeks to months. In many cases, the condition may only be controlled, not cured, and some pets require lifelong treatment for their condition.

### Is all pruritus that complicated?

No. In the majority of dogs pruritus is seasonal and the most common cause is flea bites. Other common causes of pruritus include inhalant allergies (atopy) and food allergies.

### Are some dogs more prone to pruritus than others?

Any dog can develop skin allergies or pruritus. Many purebred dogs have family histories of skin problems. Cocker Spaniels, French Poodles, West Highland White Terriers and Retrievers are known to have high incidences of skin disorders.

## Can pruritus be cured?



It depends upon the cause of your pet's itching. Some pets will require intermittent treatment for the rest of their lives. These are extreme cases and the majority of itchy dogs respond very well to relatively simple treatment. Dogs that suffer from seasonal allergies to pollens, molds and/or mites may benefit from allergy desensitization injections or "allergy shots". Allergy desensitizing injections should not be confused with anti-inflammatory injections that may be used to suppress itching.

Please do not hesitate to contact your veterinarian if you have any queries or concerns that have not been covered in this handout.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM*