

Keeping a check on your pet's coat

Skin on mammals has many functions and when things go wrong homeopathic treatment is very useful, says *John Hoare*

Skin is a complex organ that has a multiplicity of functions. For a start it covers the animal, and it is at the surface of the skin that the animal comes in contact with the outside world. It also has a role to play in the maintenance of a steady internal temperature, by sweating in hot conditions and by constricting the surface blood vessels in cold weather.

It is also an organ of excretion; the sebaceous glands associated with the hair follicles excreting minerals that are surplus to requirement in the sweat. Changes in the contents of the sweat can alter the "micro-climate" of the skin, which can lead to the colonisation of the skin by abnormal bacteria, or make the skin more attractive to insect and fungal parasites. It follows then that the internal and external causes of skin disease are actually more important than the identity of the colonising organism. If the primary cause is corrected, then the body will throw off the infection without the need for pharmaceuticals. There may however be occasions when the problem is so severe that a little help is needed.

Because the skin is on the outside it is readily

observable. Thus very early signs of skin disease are easily seen by the owner. Is it any wonder then that skin problems are some of the commonest ones seen by veterinary surgeons and also some of the most difficult to treat successfully?

When a conventionally trained veterinary surgeon has difficulty in curing a skin condition, he usually starts to look at the skin in greater and greater detail, making tests for abnormal bacteria, fungi, parasitic insects, and for allergies. The homeopathically trained vet will stand back and look at the patient as a whole being as well as at the skin. He knows that the outer trouble may be the first manifestation of a chronic disease that can go on to affect the whole of the animal. He also knows that the mental/emotional state can be the true cause of the visible skin trouble and will attempt to build that into the prescription, treating the patient as a totality. The totality is often the same as the patient's constitutional medicine but this is not always so.

The owner too when treating his pet must take the same approach as a homeopathic vet and treat

like with like, addressing the whole symptom picture if possible. There is of course the proviso that if the pet's condition is painful or if it is in great distress it should be taken to the vet sooner rather than later. When eczemas and allergies are suspected, the homeopathic medicine given should be chosen to match the visible lesions (spots, pimples, ulcers etc) as closely as possible and a simple attempt made to cover any mental symptoms that are present. When there are injuries it is sufficient to concentrate on the type of injury because the trauma itself is the most important part of the totality.

Do remember though that skin problems can be very difficult to sort out. If your pet's skin is not responding, don't persist for too long before seeking the help of a homeopathically trained vet.

Photo courtesy of The Kennel Club



Photo: Francis Hunter, BHA



Some useful medicines

Sulphur

Probably the greatest skin medicine that we know, Sulphur is useful when the skin is dry, red and very itchy. Humans describe the itch as “voluptuous” because it feels so good to scratch the lesions. If there are pustules or ulcers present, the pus is yellow; think of sulphurous emissions from volcanoes or hot mud pools. With the redness of the skin there may be redness of the eyes, mouth and lips, ears and anus.

The itch is made worse by heat. This is shown by the animal avoiding the heat of the sun if possible, scratching more in warm rooms than cold, and if covered by a blanket at night. Animals needing Sulphur tend to look untidy and may have a greasy, smelly coat.

Sulphur can cause severe aggravations. Do not use any

potency above 6c without the advice of a homeopathic vet. Sulphur 6c can be given up to four times a day but should be reduced as an improvement begins. If there is any sign of an aggravation, then stop at once.

Psorinum

Made from the fluid taken from a scabies vesicle, Psorinum is similar to Sulphur in its action on the skin. The patients are again dirty, smelly animals, but they are very chilly. They seek heat as much as Sulphur patients avoid it.

Psorinum is one of the remedies that are best used in the 30c potency. It can take a little while before the effects of one dose are seen. Therefore you should give a maximum of three tablets in one day and wait at least 10 days before repeating it. Even then if there are signs that changes are occurring wait even longer before giving another dose.

Arsenicum album

This is derived from white arsenic (arsenic trioxide) and is associated with dry itchy skins where there is a lot of dandruff which may be fine white scurf or large “bran flakes”. The skin itches so badly that the animal may scratch itself until the skin bleeds. Unlike Sulphur and Psorinum, these animals are fastidious about keeping themselves clean when they are well, and Arsenicum cats will often be seen grooming themselves. They tend to be nervous, anxious animals. All their symptoms tend to be worse at around midnight. They are very chilly animals and will hog the fire or radiator.

With Arsenicum it is best to give one 6c up to four times a day for no more than five days, and then wait to see what happens, or a 30c

twice daily for three days and then wait a while.

Natrum mur

A valuable medicine for many conditions, the origin of Natrum mur is sea salt. When Nat mur is required the skin has a greasy feel to it, the fur tends to form small clumps, and dandruff starts to form. The clumping tends to start at the tip of the tail and move forward along the back like an arrowhead, then crusts develop on the head, and itchy ulcers form on the face and lips. At the same time there can be an “egg-white” like discharge from the eyes and/or nose. The lesions are worse for heat and for consolation (they want to be alone in their sadness) and better for open air or the application of a cold flannel.

Natrum mur has a strong mental attachment to “Ailments from Grief”. If this is put together with the nature of the lesions described above, one can see that it is useful in flea allergies that develop in cats and dogs that are kennelled, or in cats in households from where children have left home or where someone has



Photo: Francis Hunter, BHA

recently died.

If there is obvious grief in the history, give one 30c twice daily for up to three days: if not, use 6c up to four times daily for five days.

Staphisagria

This medicine, made from the seeds of the plant delphinium staphisagria, the wild raisin, is associated with dry itchy eczemas that may result in thick crusts and scabs. The lesions tend to start in the groin and work forward along the abdomen, and then jump to the neck and head. They are better for warmth.

The mentals of Staphisagria are (suppressed) grief, indignation and resentment. It therefore has a great part to play in the treatment of allergies that develop after neutering and kennelling. It should be used as is Nat mur.

Graphites

Traditionally made from the black lead of the finest English drawing-pencils, this remedy is associated with rough hard dry areas of the skin, that go on to develop a sticky exudates. The discharges are described as being corrosive, glutinous and yellow. They often develop a crust and the discharge oozes from under it. These lesions can be very itchy, and are usually found on the inside of the joints such as in the armpit, groin, the inside bend of the elbow, and also behind the ears. Graphites is also associated with thick deformed nails, cracks in the pads of the toes, cracks in the nipples and in the mouth, and with some forms of cysts. Warmth, particularly that of the bed can make the itching worse, and cold damp air also makes things worse.

Try using one 6c, twice daily for up to one week.



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Traumatic skin injuries

Shock

Aconitum napellus (monkshood) is the main medicine for shock and it is usually the first medicine to give after any accident. It can be given in any potency, and as frequently as it is needed. If the effects seem to be wearing off, repeat dose.



Photo courtesy of The Kennel Club

Bruises

Arnica montana (leopard's bane) is the main medicine for bruising. It also has a mild anti-shock and an antiseptic action. The main point of Arnica is that the patient does not want to be approached, let alone touched. The pain makes them feel restless and they have trouble getting settled. Again use a 6c or 30c as frequently as is needed to make the patient comfortable.

Bryonia alba (white bryony - wild hops) is sometimes needed. In this instance the injury hurts whenever the patient moves, but is better for steady pressure on the injured part. The patient then lies perfectly still, with the most painful part underneath it. This helps to keep it still and also prevents it from being touched by anyone else. Again use whatever potency is available as often as it seems needed.

Cuts, grazes, open wounds
Calendula (marigold)

stimulates wound healing. Open wounds can be cleaned with a 10 per cent solution of Calendula tincture, dressed with Calendula cream, and Calendula 30c can be given twice daily. This will speed healing greatly.

Hypercal is a combination of Calendula and Hypericum. It is available both as a tincture and a cream. It is more appropriate than Calendula alone when there is a lot of nerve damage such as occurs when feet and tails are shut in doors.

Staphisagria has a great reputation for knife and sword wounds. It is very useful for assisting operation wounds to heal, especially if there is poor/slow healing particularly after neutering.

Burns

Cantharis is good when blisters form or are about to form. Use 30c four-hourly as needed.

Insect bites

Apis mellitus should be used if a cold, wet flannel soothes the bites.

Urtica urens should be used if the animal resents the cold bathing. In both cases use a 30c tablet every 15 minutes, or as needed.

Abscesses

Hepar sulph is used for abscesses that are hot, painful and extremely sensitive to the slightest touch. If pus has just started to form, then a 200c, three times a day should prevent the abscess from developing. If the abscess is well formed, 6c, four times a day will stimulate pus to form and the abscess to burst, whilst relieving the pain.

Silicia can be used in the same way for "cold" abscesses that are painless and slow to develop.