

Dealing With Dandruff

An expert answers questions on canine care.

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Q: My dog Lucky, an American Eskimo, has been a well dog. Now he has flakes or something that seems like dandruff on his skin and fur. Do you know what this is? What can I do to stop it?

A: Your assessment of dandruff is very accurate. The official term is seborrhea, meaning scaling or flaking of the skin. Scaling can be dry (seborrhea sicca) or oily (seborrhea oleosa), depending on the dog, its diet, underlying health conditions, weather and treatments.

Scaling is caused by the abnormal growth and shedding of skin cells. Some dogs have a primary disorder with no apparent contributing cause. The problem is primarily cosmetic in these cases. Many cases, however, result from conditions that affect the health of the skin, such as allergies to fleas, food, inhalants, shampoos and other topical agents; internal diseases in the liver, kidney or metabolism; endocrine diseases, such as hypothyroidism or Cushing's; parasites such as fleas, mites and intestinal worms; nutritional deficiencies of zinc or fatty acids; or bacterial and fungal infections.

If you suddenly see scaly skin, make an appointment with your veterinarian. He or she can decide the best treatment, depending on the results of a physical and skin exam, and the likelihood of underlying disease conditions. Recommendations may include blood tests, fecal exam for parasites, specific tests for the skin, and allergy testing. Therapy may include diet changes and supplements, medicated shampoos, oral and topical medications, flea control and hormone supplements. Daily brushing often helps stimulate a more normal skin shedding cycle. Good luck!

Q: My 3-year-old Pembroke Welsh Corgi scuffs his front feet when he walks more than a couple of blocks. The tops of his nails scrape off and bleed. I have tried boots, which either fall off or wear through. He loves to go for walks but avoids walking in grassy areas, which would be better for his feet. Is there anything you can recommend regarding durable footwear or other options? He is not interested in playing ball and is currently on a diet because he is overweight.

A: The wearing of the toenails is obviously a problem, but I am more concerned about the possible reasons for the abnormal gait that causes this to happen in the first place. You don't mention how long this problem has been going on, whether it is getting worse or what medical attention has been received. Whenever a dog's gait changes, your veterinarian should be consulted. Abnormal wearing of the toenails can be one of the earliest signs.