

## Itchy Dog Needs Prednisone

**Intermittent prednisone use will relieve most dogs' itching.**

*By Jon Geller, DVM*

Q. We have two Cavalier King Charles Spaniels whom we love dearly! The younger dog continuously scratches herself and bites at her paws. She has no fleas. I have tried many types of shampoo with no success. I called the vet, who recommended Benadryl two to three times a day. At first this seemed to help, but now she's back to scratching. The older one scratches a little, but nowhere as much. Is there some magic you can suggest to correct or help lessen the problem?

A. Giving Benadryl for allergies is a little like taking aspirin for a fractured skull: It won't touch it.

The magic you are looking for is an inexpensive little steroid pill known as prednisone. It truly works miracles in itchy dogs by shutting down the cells of the immune system that are acting up to make your dog itchy. This is not the type of steroid you take to make you stronger. It actually breaks down muscle tissue.

Prednisone, for all of its wonder, also brings with it a cornucopia of side effects which range from the inconvenient to the life-threatening. Used long term, prednisone can lead to Cushing's disease, a severe, body-wide, hormonal disease that usually causes an early death. Used for short periods of time, prednisone will cause increased urination, water intake, panting and food intake. It also suppresses the immune system, leaving a dog more susceptible to infections.

For these reasons, prednisone must be used under the direction of a veterinarian, and carefully monitored. There are many ways to dose prednisone, but my favorite is called pulsed therapy, in which a three-week course is given several times a year when the itchiness appears to be the worst. By using steroids intermittently, many of the long term serious side effects can be avoided.

Good luck and ask your veterinarian about prednisone, the wonder drug for dogs with allergies.