

Nutrition for the Cocker Spaniel

Learn how to properly feed the skin they're in.

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The first place you'll see your Cocker Spaniels nutritional intake or lack of it is in its skin.

Cockers have more than their share of skin problems, which makes it important that owners pay attention to the nutritional components that affect that part of health. Owners need to make sure they address this common breed problem through diet, says Dan Carey, D.V.M., a clinical nutritionist and director of technical communications in the research and development division at the Iams Company.

The skin is the largest organ in the body. And yet, the organs of the body sit at the dinner table, the skin sits at the end and is the last one to get fed. The body prioritizes where nutrients go, based on the perceived needs of the organs, and the skin is last to get whatever is left over in the way of nutrients. We have to provide everything in the diet that the other organs need and still get the skin what it needs, says Dr. Carey.

For healthy skin, feed Cockers a diet containing linoleic acid, and the fatty acids Omega-6 and Omega-3 in a balanced ratio ranging from 5-to-1 to 10-to-1. Research shows this helps reduce itching and the inflammatory compounds that develop in the skin. Irritated skin can be set off by all kinds of stimuli: flea bites, grass, dry air, dryness or any number of allergies. If there is too much Omega-6, the inflammatory compounds increase along with the skin irritation. The benefits of balanced fatty acids are not limited to the skin; but with Cockers, they can help reduce some of their dermal outbreaks.

One skin problem that commonly affects dogs is dandruff. We don't think of the skin as a very active organ, but the cells of the skin turn over in 21 days, Dr. Carey says. If your dog has dandruff, it possibly means the skin is being sloughed too early and some of this can be related to diet.

Cockers may be prone to another skin condition known as Vitamin A dermatosis. The disorder resembles seborrhea and may cause skin to secrete excess oil, be overly dry or make skin cells grow too thick or too quickly. The dermatosis is caused by a nutritional deficiency, and treatment is as simple as ensuring that the dogs diet contains a sufficient amount of Vitamin A. Some veterinarians may also recommend the use of retinoid or Retin A, which are derivatives of vitamin A.