

HOT SPOTS

By: Dr. Douglas R. Yearout
All Animal and Bird Clinic
Everett, Washington, USA
www.holisticanimaldoc.com
All Rights Reserved

My dog occasionally gets hot spots. He licks them until they are raw and bleeding. Conventional treatments help things go away for awhile, but do not cure them and they come right back. What are these things, and what can I do about them?

A hot spot is a layman's term for an area of severe irritation anywhere on the skin. It develops suddenly and is called a hot spot because it looks just like a burn. The surface hair is missing from the wound and the surrounding body hair is all matted and thick with dried serum that has been oozing from the sore. It is extremely painful and the dog is bothered so much that she is unable to stop licking the area which makes it even larger and more painful. There is often a strong sour-wet odor. They often worry the wound to the exclusion of all other activities, even eating or drinking, and just obsessively lick and chew. There can be more than one hot spot present on the body and the time licking each area is divided up in some pattern that only the dog understands. The discomfort is so great that the dog can whine and act like someone is killing him as he scoots along on the floor rubbing and rolling like a hog in a mud trough or he will crouch timidly on the floor and hide. It is very hard on us as the caretakers to see so much mental anxiety and not be able to help them. These self inflicted wounds occur more often in warm weather than when it is cool.

The causes of hot spots are many. They can begin from the itch of a flea bite, or an allergic reaction to certain foods can bring up itchy hives, or a summer heat rash can develop in the groin or armpits. These can lead to an eventual hotspot. Whatever the cause, the dog reacts in the only way it can by licking, chewing or scratching, or he may rub incessantly under the edge of a low table or chair. By the time you notice the wound he has enlarged it and made the sore worse by his own self trauma. They are like little kids picking scabs and scratching. They just won't stop the licking. They may even keep you up at night listening to that tongue sloshing and lollygagging. Of course they can bother the sore all they want, unabated, but if you or I try to help clean it or clip the surrounding matted, glued-down hair, then they totally hate you for it by trying to escape, or push you away with those shiny big teeth.

Conventional treatments vary but usually involve clipping and cleaning the wounds, applying an antibiotic or cortisone containing ointment, and giving oral corticosteroids, and/or antibiotics for 7-10 days. Often an injection of steroids is given. An Elizabethan collar is often placed around the neck to prevent access to the hot spot while it is healing. All of these palliate or suppress the pain, itch, and kill secondary bacteria on the skin surface. It will get the dog thru the storm, make them calmer, and let the skin heal. Reoccurrences are common up to several times a year.

Homeopathic viewpoint sees a hot spot as a type of mistunement of the life force or defense mechanism. It is a symptom containing a lot of energy somewhat like a geyser blowing off. The hot spot is seen as only a part of the entire picture of the animal's total condition. Steroids and antibiotics are rarely used and instead an appropriate homeopathic remedy will be prescribed to help the animal come back into balance. The removal of hot spots and other skin issues can be permanent or very long lasting. The wound is clipped of fur and cleaned as well, but instead a soothing aloe or calendula flower gel will be used. Yes, even that goofy E-collar radar dome might still be used for a few days, but if the remedy is working well there should be fairly rapid improvement without the conventional drugs. This enables the body to retain its normal complement of bacteria, minimizes secondary yeast infections, and preserves the natural immune system status, all impossible when suffering the side effects of the drug therapies.