

## Skin Ailments

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I have a 5 year old neutered female Rottweiler. She has recently been experiencing severe dandruff and itching on her back. I brush her every couple of days and a lot of loose hair comes out but now the hair is coming off in patches, exposing patches of skin which bleed. She yelps so I know it is very sensitive. Luckily, she cannot reach it to worry it but it looks very much like the "rain scald" condition I used to see in horses when I had them. For a furry creature like this what treatment options are available until I can get to a vet to actually diagnose the condition? I am using an anti-itch spray I got at the pet store but it doesn't seem to be sufficient. I also have bathed her with human dandruff shampoo thinking there may be skin conditioners in them. How should I handle/prevent this in the future? I have never had a dog with skin conditions. ??? Thanks for any advice.

This is a very complicated question. Prevention of course fully depends on the cause of this malady in the first place.

As we have mentioned before, in a hierarchy of importance to the body the skin is the most expressive, and also the least important of the major organ systems. The skin is also the largest organ of the body comprising a huge surface area. When there is dis-"ease" or a condition requiring healing, the body does whatever it can to heal itself. This healing process or energy called the "life principle" will determine the best way to spare the bodies major internal organ systems such as the heart, brain, or the kidneys. In order to save itself from internal squabble the energy of the disease must manifest somewhere less important so the body packages all that energy on the surface. Now that doesn't mean that the skin is not mighty uncomfortable, unsightly, or smelly, and this dynamic or energetic influence will constantly beg attention from us. It itches, it burns, there is dandruff, or warts, its greasy or smelly and there are pustules and infection there. You can think of this as a geyser letting off steam. If the condition stays inside it will literally destroy the internal body, but if the geyser goes off, and spouts out occasionally on the surface, a lot of the pressure is alleviated. This is why we see flare ups of skin conditions, or why they seem to come on strong, and then return back to their internal bed again. We can try lots of over the counter products made to treat various skin, and hair problems, and many of those may actually work (palliation) well enough for a time. We may go to our animal doctor and enlist their best opinion as to the cause, and then give the prescriptions, both internal, and external medicines. Hopefully somehow the skin and hair coat improve. But... how many times have we thought something cured, only to find it relapses over and over when the medicines wear off or are discontinued? How many times has a skin issue been cured, and then to find that weeks, or months later our beloved pet gets some new malady that is even deeper, and more major ; but that skin still looks great!

We all want that help for our pets, and we want it now, but we must look deeper, and be sure that we work with the body as it cures, rather than to just cover something up or suppress the disease, driving it deeper inside.

The best way to help your Rotti's skin is to evaluate first, the diet. Make sure the food is nutritious, balanced, and that supplements are given as necessary. We have discussed these things in past columns so see the website for those articles. Often with moderate attention to changing foods to more fresh and uncooked vegetables, lean meats and giving less grain makes all the difference in the world. The additions of the anti-oxidant vitamins A, C, and E and the omega 3 fatty acids from flax seed and cold water fish oils can help the body immensely to begin the skin healing process. Digestive enzymes are a must with each meal. It sounds like your dog has very dry flakey skin, and that the hair is very loose. Hair falls out easily when hormones are imbalanced, and when there is hair follicle inflammation. If the skin is actually peeling and bleeding in hairless patches then there must be some type of critical breakdown in the integrity of the skin layers. Perhaps this is an infection with Staph bacteria, and or yeast. There might be an allergy to foods, or environmental substances like flea medicines. It is odd that you have only mentioned the back of the dog, and no problems with the groin, belly, armpits, or feet. Dandruff in most cases is usually all over the body, and not just confined to the back. There can be areas that your dog cannot groom as you have said, and the problem may be intensified by her not being able to groom in that area, versus grooming too much. If she is yelping that means that the skin just plain hurts. There can be autoimmune or immune deficiency conditions where the skin looks a lot like what you have described. I find colloidal oatmeal shampoo and /or an after bath rinse to be very soothing. Leave the shampoo lather on for 15 minutes before a triple warm water rinse, and leave the crème rinse on, not toweling it off. A fresh lemon and rosemary dip that you make yourself can make a huge difference in skin health. Take two whole lemons completely grated, two tablespoons of chopped fresh rosemary, and boil in two quarts of water, then strain through cheesecloth. Cool the liquid and use as an after bath crème rinse working it well into all the irritated areas on the top of the back. Let the dog shake, and let the rinse dry on the coat without toweling it off. This rinse is excellent for any itching, dandruff, raw spots, mange, fleas, and infections. Always try it on a small section of irritated skin to make sure it is not painful before fully using it on the body.

With anti-itch sprays, I find that you need to get the skin fully damp to be effective. The ones with aloe vera, comfrey herb, and green tea seem to work the best. As for any herbal non drug that you put on the skin, the time period between applications can be relatively short. Sometimes only a few hours before the poor critter is right back there bothering it again.

I have used human dandruff shampoos, and many made specifically for animals. The pH, and skin of animals is a bit different from humans so pet shampoos are often of more use than human brands. These do well on the dry skin but can often be temporary. Conventional veterinarians have many medicated shampoos made with ingredients such as anti-histamines, coal tar, sulphur, anti-bacterial or anti-yeast drugs. Any skin and coat products will most likely need to be used a minimum of twice a week to be effective.

There is a tincture of yucca available that can be given internally in the food. It is very bitter but may help some itchy pets, Also a tincture of stinging nettle plants can be used diluted with green tea as a skin rinse to alleviate itching temporarily. I would also try fresh aloe vera gel on the raw spots twice a day.

You say your dog cannot reach the back, but most pets can and do groom whatever we put on the skin. They lick excessively, and will just swallow these products, so we must make sure they are edible, won't cause illness by ingestion, or we must use an Elizabethan cone on the neck to prevent this. We hope these suggestions help until you can get to your veterinarian for a diagnosis and further treatment.