



Dermatology for Animals

SKIN AND EAR CLINIC

p: 07 3359 0777

p: 1300 A SKIN VET

e: dfa@live.com.au

w: www.skinvet.com.au

Flea Bite Hypersensitivity



Flea bite hypersensitivity is also known as Flea Allergy Dermatitis (FAD). In areas where flea control is poor it is the most common form of allergic skin disease in dogs and cats. In both species it causes severe and intense itching to develop. This leads to self trauma as your pet tries to relieve the irritation.

KEY POINTS

Caused by flea saliva, which is injected into the skin as the flea sucks your pet's blood.

The allergy causes severe itching to develop which leads to self trauma as your pets tries to relieve the itch.

The most commonly affected areas on the dog are around the base of the tail, along the back extending forward to the chest and backs of the thighs.

Treatment centers around the elimination of fleas from your pets and its environment. Anti-inflammatory medication may be required in the short term.

Once developed, there is NO cure for the allergy, only control.

How does it develop?

Flea bite hypersensitivity is caused by the bite of the common cat flea (*Ctenocephalades felis*). This is the most common flea in Australia and although it may be called the cat flea it isn't fussy and will just as happily bite dogs (and us!). Through repeated exposure to the saliva of the fleas (this is injected into the skin as the flea feeds on your pet's blood) your pet may develop an

allergic reaction to the saliva. This causes an inflammatory response that is completely out of proportion to the amount of saliva that is injected or the number of fleas that you may be able to find on your pet. In fact, when we examine allergic animals it is more common for us NOT to find lives fleas present.

Clinical signs – What does it look like?

The most common distribution of the irritation in the dog seems to be centered around the base of the tail, extending forward up the back towards the chest and on the caudal aspect (back) of the thighs. However, in more severe cases the irritation may progress to cover much larger parts of the body. The constant irritation and self trauma (through itching, scratching, biting, rolling, rubbing etc.) may damage the skin and allow secondary bacterial or yeast infections to develop. In these cases the entire body may come to be involved. Other consequences of the continued biting may be severe damage to the front teeth.

How do we diagnose it?

The most common way to diagnose if your pet has flea allergy is to perform an insect elimination trial using a variety of products. The specific one used is selected after discussion during the consultation. We can also perform intradermal allergy testing to confirm the skin's sensitivity to the flea saliva.



Classic signs are centered around the tail base and up the back



The constant chewing may cause severe damage to the front teeth

Treatment

The best treatment is the elimination of all fleas from your pet and its environment. If this can be achieved then all of the irritation will be completely controlled. This long term program will be developed during the consultation and tailored specifically for your pet's circumstances. NB it is critically important that both the affected animal and all in-contact pets are treated at the same time.

If it is not possible to eliminate the fleas and thus maintain control it may be that your pet will also require some form of anti-inflammatory medication. Unfortunately it is not possible to desensitise your pet against flea saliva at this time.



Intradermal allergy testing