

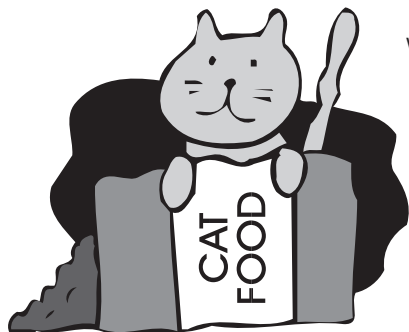
Dry Skin

Many pets, like people, have dry skin. Dry skin can be itchy and uncomfortable and is often an indication of poor health or diet. In humans dry skin is made worse by frequent bathing and hand washing, and by exposure to cold weather. Dogs and cats don't bathe daily with soap and water, and they have fur to protect them from the elements. Dry skin or haircoat in a dog or cat is most often related to nutritional or physical problems. Flaking, dandruff, dry or dull coat, or excessive shedding are all conditions that need to be addressed with diet change, nutritional supplements or medication. A healthy pet should have a soft, shiny, lustrous coat.



Many times when a pet comes into our hospital we can tell whether that pet is eating good or poor quality food just by the condition of the skin and coat. The body uses substances called fatty acids to make skin oils. Many cheaper dog and cat foods are lacking in these fatty acids, and so the skin and coat will be dry. Diets lacking in fatty acids may not be nutritionally complete in other ways as well. Feeding the best food you can afford is always our recommendation, and skin and coat health is one reason why.

Foods containing good amounts of fatty acids include Science Diet[®], Eukanuba[®] and Nutro-Max[®]. Some pets need more fatty acids than even these foods provide, especially if they have allergies or other problems that worsen dry skin. Fatty acid supplements are available in a gel capsule or a liquid. Within 2-4 weeks of starting on those supplements, or switching to more nutritious food, we usually notice a dramatic improvement in the dry skin and coat,



When pets with dry skin need bathing it is important to use soap-free or moisturizing products. There are also light oils available that can be sprayed on or used as a rinse after bathing, to moisturize the skin. The sprays are especially useful for cats, who usually don't appreciate a full bath. With severe problems, especially seborrhea, we may recommend a once or twice weekly regimen with medicated shampoo and cream rinse. We can provide products that will work for your dog or cat, depending on the severity of the dry skin and your ability to bathe your pet. Those moisturizing shampoos and rinses can be used instead of or in addition to fatty acid supplements.

Many diseases and conditions affecting overall health affect the skin as well. Low thyroid levels, allergies, kidney and heart disease, seborrhea and many other problems cause or contribute to dry skin. Correcting the underlying problem will usually lead to improvement in the skin within a few weeks. Persistent dry skin, despite a good diet and fatty acid supplements, is an indication that something more serious may be going on and is worth investigating.

