

UNDER THE WEATHER

Pododermatitis

“Look at his angry red paws,” said Timmy’s pet parent. I had to admit the paws did look terrible. Timmy had been going at them the whole night, leaving them looking angry, red and swollen. I asked her some questions about Timmy’s surroundings, diet, found out if there was a previous history of the same problem before, checked his skin to see if there were problems elsewhere, did a full physical exam and noted the findings. “This is pododermatitis,” I told Timmy’s parent. Pododermatitis is an inflammation of the paws. The causes can be several:

Infection: There may be a pus-like discharge from the lesions. There may be nodules or fungal lesions or ulcers in severe cases. The pet may lick his paws, and there may be hair loss.

Demodicosis: This is one of the most common causes of pododermatitis, and is diagnosed by a skin-scraping.

Allergic: Constant itching and licking is the hallmark of allergic pododermatitis. Top of the paws may look brownish due to saliva stains. Allergy may be due to food, dust or pollen.

Contact dermatitis: This causes redness on the underside of the paws due to contact with the allergen (could be a floor cleaner, grass, carpet, etc).

Immune mediated: This is seen as crusty, scaly skin on the paws. The paws, footpads as well as nail beds are involved.

Hormonal/endocrine: Rarely, hormonal causes affect the paws and are seen as pustules and redness. Other signs of hormonal disorders like loss of hair on the tail or body are also seen.

Tumours: Tumours involving the feet may be seen initially as small nodules affecting one of the feet. These may later enlarge and become ulcerated, involving the entire digit or foot. Pain due to the growing tumour may cause the pet to lick the affected paw, causing secondary infections.



**DR SANGEETA
VENGSAKAR SHAH**

Environmental: Cement work in the house or damp and hot environments can also cause pododermatitis, so make sure you report it to your vet.

Diagnosis of pododermatitis may need additional tests like culture, skin scrapings, biopsy or blood tests.

Treatment depends entirely on the specific cause, and may include antihistamines, antibiotics or steroids, foot dips or injections for skin mites depending on the causative factor. Your vet will also advise local treatments like foot dips, ointments and shampoos. Apple cider vinegar or boric acid foot dips may be used to clear the infection in the paws. The only FDA-approved treatment for demodex is Mitaban dip. These dips are

approved for bi-weekly use, but the success rate doubles when dips are performed weekly. Dips should be preceded by a benzoyl peroxide shampoo of the feet for its follicular flushing activity. The patient should be discouraged from getting the paws wet between dips, which makes them difficult to use in patients that go outside. If the parent is performing weekly dips, they should be cautioned not to use the medication on dogs if they are pregnant, diabetic, or on anti hypertensive medications, cardiac medications or antidepressants.

Once the mites have been eradicated, the patient should have four more weekly dips for complete eradication. Along with the dip and benzoyl peroxide shampoos, antibiotics need to be prescribed for the entire treatment regimen. Steroids should not be given to dogs with demodex, since they may already be immunosuppressed. In some patients, Ivermectin at 200-800 ug/kg/day orally is another treatment for demodicosis. Supplements like omega-3 fatty acids and spot-on applications may be suggested.

Your vet may suggest changes in diet or advise an hypoallergenic diet, where protein is broken down into molecules the body doesn’t recognise as an allergen. Other nutritional supplements like biotin may be advised. Regular follow-ups will ensure the problem is managed successfully, even if not cured (as in allergies).



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