

# LET US HELP YOU Take Care Of Your PET'S SKIN



*Shuswap*  
VETERINARY CLINIC

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Our goal is to help pet owners recognise the signs of skin conditions in their pets and encourage them to talk to their vet about preventive measures to carry out at home.

We can help you care for your pet's skin- just ask your pet's doctor.

# How to Help your Pet have a Better dermatology examination

Your pet has itchy, irritated skin and you're feeling helpless. Not to worry! You can help your veterinarian arrive at a diagnosis by remembering these simple tips.

**M**any of us may have suffered a skin issue at some point in our lives—bug bites, poison ivy, rashes or other types of irritation—and we all know it's no fun. In fact, sometimes irritated skin symptoms can be so severe that it can feel like you're going crazy.

And so, it should be no surprise to us that itchy, irritated skin in our pets can drive them to endless scratching, biting and licking to try to find relief.

Skin issues in your pet can be extremely difficult for your veterinary team to diagnose—not to mention, very frustrating for you and painful for your pet.

Yes, there are ways you can be prepared for your pet's dermatologic examination to help speed along the diagnostic process.

## History is everything

If you suspect a problem with your pet's skin or are already scheduled for a dermatology exam, it's very helpful for you to come prepared with a good history. But what does that mean?

**A history of symptoms:** Where on your pet does the most scratching/licking/biting occur? Have you noticed hair loss, increased redness, scaliness, spots or bumps, crusty or scabby patches, or open sores? Are your pet's eyes irritated? Have you seen fleas on your pet? Have you noticed other changes, like weight loss/gain, personality, appetite, or urinary changes?

**A travel history:** Has your pet been out of the region in the past two years? Has their environment changed in the past six months? If so, there may be infectious diseases for your veterinarian to consider that are not present where you live.

**A diet history:** Have you changed your pet's regular food in the last 12 months? Bring a list of the brand names and types of food your pet has been eating. What types of snacks or treats does he eat on a regular basis? Bring a list of those, too.

**A drug history:** Think about the types of parasite prevention you use on your pet. What type of flea prevention do you use, and has it changed or stayed consistent over the last year? Make sure to have the specific name of the product. Has your pet been given any antibiotics, steroid or cortisone pills or shots, or allergy medicine?

**A seasonal history:** Does your pet's itchy, irritated skin occur only in the spring, or are you seeing these symptoms at other times of the year?



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# Why is my pet so itchy and what can I do about it?

There are many reasons for pets to be itchy. Sometimes it is an easy thing to figure out (fleas!) but in some cases, we rule out causes to identify exactly what is causing the itchiness.

## Causes of Itching

1. Allergies – environmental, food, bugs
2. Parasites – fleas, lice, mites
3. Skin Infections – bacteria, yeast, ringworm
4. Immune-mediated disease
5. Certain skin tumors
6. Boredom, anxiety

Often it is a **combination** of the causes listed above, rather than just one. Low-level allergies may not be apparent until something pushes them over the threshold.

## How do we identify the cause?

This can be VERY difficult, mostly because many triggers can lead to the same signs of itching and discomfort.

## Diagnostic tools that we can use here at Shuswap Veterinary Clinic:

1. A thorough discussion with you about your pet's environment, food, history
2. Skin swabs and tape samples
3. Skin scrapings
4. Fungal cultures
5. Food trial with one (or more) hypoallergenic prescription or homemade balanced diets (8 weeks)
6. Skin biopsy (this needs sedation or anesthetic) to send to a pathologist for analysis
7. A full bloodwork panel, including hormone or serum allergen levels

If we are still looking for answers after these tests, we can send you for a referral appointment with a veterinary dermatologist (the closest one takes appointments in Kelowna). Testing for specific environmental allergens can happen there.

# DOG AND CAT ITCH SCALE

## How severe is your pet's itching?



Pruritus (itching) manifests itself by scratching, nibbling, licking, when a pet rubs against objects or people, or when a pet rubs its back. The scale below is designed to measure the severity of itching. Read all the descriptions starting from the bottom, then place a mark anywhere on the vertical line to indicate the point at which you think your pet's level of itchiness currently lies. The mark may be placed between two descriptions, if necessary.

