

## Pemphigus Foliaceus (PF) in the Dog and Cat

*Pemphigus* (Latin for “blister”) is used for a group of autoimmune diseases that result in blisters or crusts on the skin. The body is essentially “fighting off” its own skin. The attachments between each skin cell are attacked by the body and “round up” resulting in blisters or crusts. Humans also get PF-it is not a contagious disease. Sometimes PF is due to a drug reaction such as Cephalexin, enalapril, Augmentin, sulfa drugs, or topicals in dogs used for fleas/ticks or due to an underlying tumor. Most often, however, the inciting cause is not known.

In dogs, genetics may play a role as it is seen more in Akitas, Chows, and Shih tzus. However Dachshunds, Schipperkes, and herding breeds are some of the other breeds affected. There is no age or sex predilection. Lesions in dogs may be present on the face, trunk, foot pads, ear flaps and rarely the nail beds. In dogs with footpad involvement, “punched out” lesions on the pads result in lameness. Lymph nodes may be enlarged and the dog may be depressed and febrile. PF in the dog has been reported along with other conditions such as hypothyroidism, thymoma, and systemic lupus erythematosus. It is unknown if diet plays a role but in some dogs, a prescription hypoallergenic diet has resulted in remission.

PF in cats may consist of erosions and yellow crusts affecting the face, ear flaps, nail beds, or nipples. Fever and sometimes, itching may occur. There is no age or sex predilection.

Ringworm can mimic PF so a fungal culture is usually performed to be sure PF is present and not ringworm! A cytology and/or skin biopsy is needed to make the diagnosis. A complete blood count may show elevated white blood cells.

Treatment involves sun avoidance as sun exposure can worsen the disease. Steroids are initially used to get the patient in remission. Other medications may be added such as azathioprine, chlorambucil, or cyclosporine which can be used long term if the patient is monitored. Long-term steroid therapy is not advisable. Oral Vitamin E and sun avoidance are recommended for each patient.

Please feel free to ask us for any further information about PF!

**Veterinary Allergy & Dermatology, Inc.**

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