What You Should Know About Flea-Allergy Dermatitis

Intense scratching and biting are the most common signs of flea-allergy dermatitis. Reddened skin, bumps on the skin, self-inflicted abrasions and hair loss are common. In dogs, these lesions are most common on the lower back, inner thighs, abdomen, flanks and neck. The skin may feel greasy and have an unusual odor. Skin infections due to bacteria result from excessive scratching and biting. The skin may become thick and dark in long-standing cases. In cats, reddish-brown crusts are often present on the head, neck and lower back.

Causes
Flea-allergy dermatitis results when a pet is unusually sensitive to flea bites.

Diagnosis
Your veterinarian may suspect flea-allergy dermatitis based on physical examination findings. Finding fleas, flea eggs or flea debris (flea feces that looks like black pepper) on an animal is proof of flea infestation. Tapeworm segments on the
animal or in its stool are additional proof. The typical signs and skin lesions described above suggest that an animal is allergic to flea bites. This diagnosis can be confirmed by skin testing.

**Treatment and Home Care**

Flea control is the safest and most effective means of controlling flea-allergy dermatitis. For tips about flea control, ask your veterinarian for a copy of the Hill’s® Client Information Series handout titled “Fleas.”

Your veterinarian may prescribe one or more of the following treatments depending on your pet’s clinical signs. Anti-inflammatory agents help relieve the intense itching that occurs in pets with flea-allergy dermatitis. Antibiotics are useful in controlling bacterial skin infections as are antiseborrheic and antibacterial shampoos. Dewormers effectively control tapeworm infections that can occur as a result of flea infestation.

**Nutritional Plan**

If your pet has severe skin disease due to flea-allergy dermatitis, your veterinarian may give you special feeding instructions. Some patients with traumatized skin may benefit from foods with increased levels of protein and energy during the recovery process. Such foods include Hill’s® Prescription Diet® i/d® Canine and i/d® Feline Gastrointestinal Health.

When your pet’s recovery is complete, your veterinarian may suggest a dietary change based on your pet’s age and body condition, and on the presence or absence of disease in other organs and body systems. Optimal nutrition provides for a pet’s needs based on age and activity level, but more importantly, reduces the health risks associated with feeding excess sodium, calcium, phosphorus, protein and calories. Foods that avoid these harmful excesses and provide proper nutrition for each life stage include the Hill’s® Science Diet® brand of pet foods.

**Transitioning Food**

Unless recommended otherwise by your veterinarian, gradually introduce any new food over a seven-day period. Mix the new food with your pet’s former food, gradually increasing its proportion until only the new food is fed.

If your pet is one of the few that doesn’t readily accept a new food, try warming the canned food to body temperature, hand feeding for the first few days, or mixing the dry food with warm water (wait ten minutes before serving). Feed only the recommended food. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is important because the success or failure of treatment depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new food.

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**Home Care Instructions**

Client’s Name: _________________________________________________________

Patient’s Name:  _________________________________________________________

Medication(s):  _________________________________________________________

Nutritional Recommendation:  ____________________________________________

Follow-Up Appointment: ________________________________________________  (Hospital Stamp Area Above)

REGULAR VISITS WILL HELP OUR VETERINARY HEALTH CARE TEAM PROVIDE FOR YOUR PET’S BEST INTEREST.