

Seborrhoea in English Springer Spaniels

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Author: Cathy Lambert

What is Seborrhoea?

Seborrhoea is a skin disorder in which the skin cells and sebaceous glands become overactive. The overproduction of sebum from these glands causes the skin to become excessively greasy, and the overproductive skin cells make the skin scaly and flaky.

There are two main pathways for the development of Seborrhoea:

1. Primary Seborrhoea

This is an inherited condition, and affected dogs will generally have obvious symptoms by the time they are 12-18 months of age, and occasionally as young as 10 weeks. There are 2 kinds of Primary Seborrhoea:

Seborrhoea oleosa - This is the greasier form of the condition, and the one which English Springer Spaniels can be genetically predisposed to.

Seborrhoea sicca - This is the drier form of the condition.

2. Secondary Seborrhoea

This can occur in any breed, is not an inherited condition, and generally doesn't occur in younger dogs. It is secondary to some other causative factor such as an allergy. If the allergy can be identified and removed, then the Seborrhoea may also be controlled.

What is the Incidence in English Springer Spaniels

Low

What are the Signs or Symptoms?

Symptoms are the same for both Primary and Secondary Seborrhoea, and can either affect the skin over the whole body or just in localised patches such as in moist skinfolds. The skin may become thickened, greasy, flaky and smelly, the coat may be dull, and nails may become dry and brittle. Your dog may also show signs of itchiness, and chronic ear infections are also common, particularly with Seborrhoea oleosa. Dogs with Seborrhoea may also develop secondary skin infections, particularly if the itching causes them to scratch a lot causing lesions, and facilitating the spread of any bacterial or yeast infection.

How is it Diagnosed?

To distinguish between Primary and Secondary Seborrhoea, your vet may be guided by the age of your dog, but may also get a definitive diagnosis by sending a small skin sample away for laboratory identification. This will also help to rule out skin disorders other than Seborrhoea.

How is it Treated?

The dry form of Primary Seborrhoea is generally easier to control than the greasy form, however there is no cure for either, and treatment of the symptoms will be necessary for the whole of your dog's life. This will entail regular washing with an antiseborrhoeic shampoo, cleaning your dog's ears if there is a build up of wax, and close monitoring for signs of ear or skin infections. If your dog's ears or skin become more smelly or itchy, this may indicate an infection, and a visit to your vet will be required. Your vet will also help you to decide which strength of shampoo/moisturiser to use and how often to bathe your dog in the initial treatment period, and provide antibiotics and other topical medications if necessary. Depending on the severity of the condition and how well your dog responds to the treatments, you will then need to decide by trial and error how regularly you will need to bathe your dog to keep the condition under control. In order for the shampooing to be effective, please follow instructions closely, and also be aware that bathing more often than necessary may also make the condition worse. Keeping your dog's coat trimmed short will also make shampooing more effective.

The condition in many dogs can be kept under control with regular bathing and attention; however it can also be a struggle in some cases, even with good care. For these dogs, there are systemic drugs that may be tried. The success is somewhat variable, and there are also often side-effects, so are generally only used in very difficult cases.

How can you Avoid Buying a Dog with Seborrhoea?

Primary Seborrhoea in English Springer Spaniels is an inherited condition, although the exact mode of transmission has not yet been identified. To reduce the incidence of this disease, responsible breeders will generally not breed with affected dogs or their close relatives. Ask the breeder whether the sire and dam of a puppy you are considering purchasing have ever had problems with Seborrhoea, and also make sure you see the dam (and the sire if he is kept at the same facility), and check out her condition.