

SCABIES

the allergy impersonator

By Deva Khalsa DVM

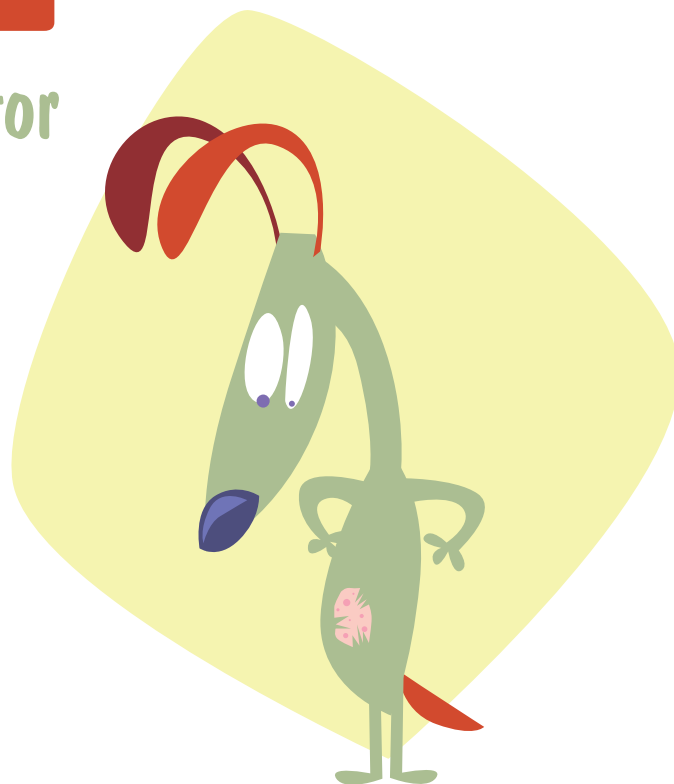
Holly used to bring her Cocker Spaniel, Myrtle, to my veterinary practice near Philadelphia. Several years after I'd moved to New Zealand, she contacted me again to schedule a phone consult. Myrtle was in trouble; it seems she'd been itching ferociously for almost two years. Holly had become a regular at her local veterinarian's office and he had referred her to a dermatologist. She decided to call me and see what I had to say before she went off to the specialist.

Itching dogs have reached epidemic proportions over the years. I've specialized in treating allergies for thirty of them. The first thing I do when I take a patient's history however, is make sure the itching problem is truly due to allergies. Over the years I've learned that two things, a yeast called *Malassezia* and *Sarcoptic Mange* (also known as scabies), can look just like an allergy. In fact, with scabies, the better the dog is taken care of, the harder it is to diagnose.

So I asked some very particular questions. I found out that Holly herself had a few patches of red bumps that itched when she took a hot shower. Myrtle was itching all the time; she stopped to scratch in the middle of chasing a squirrel or while eating her favorite food. She had red bumps on her lower abdomen and had been treated with steroids and antibiotics, on and off, for almost two years.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SCABIES

- Ferocious itching
- Other dogs in the household itching
- Contact with unknown dogs or fox
- Red bumps on humans
- Dry crusty area on tips of ears
- Can look just like a skin allergy
- Dog stops to scratch during play or running



I told Holly I thought Myrtle had sarcoptic mange. Myrtle's story is not uncommon. I find about one out of 25 dogs who are brought to me for allergies actually have scabies.

Like allergies, scabies has also reached epidemic proportions. The beginning stages of scabies look just like a skin allergy. If your dog is suddenly and very intensely itching, it can be a good idea to treat for scabies before considering allergies. Veterinary dermatologists endorse this practice because the mites are very difficult to find in skin scrapings. They live deep in the skin and superficial skin scrapings of dogs with scabies usually produce negative results. When skin scrapings don't work, you then have the option of multiple skin biopsies under anesthesia and the vet may or may not find the mites. This is the problem with sarcoptic mange. Often, it's just easier to treat the dog for mange and see if there's improvement. If you're getting small clusters of itchy red bumps on your body at the same time your dog is experiencing a ferocious itching problem, then it's a very good indication that your dog might have scabies. Canine scabies mites can pass to their owners and cause itchy red bumps, but they cannot reproduce on our skin, and usually die a couple of weeks after exposure, unless the affected dog continues to expose his owners.

Scabies is easily passed from dog to dog and your dog might pick it up at a boarding kennel, the park or the groomers. Foxes can also carry this mite and transmit it to dogs. I once had a client who insisted that his dog couldn't have scabies as he never encountered any other dogs. He had just been to the dermatologist himself for his little itchy red

bumps. The human dermatologist had no idea what they were. I insisted he treat his dog for scabies and return for a recheck in three weeks. His dog was totally fine after treatment and it was then that he realized that his dog played with a mangy fox every morning!

The scabies mites, resembling microscopic crabs, tunnel deep into the dog's skin, causing allergic reactions and irritation. The scabies mite is very hard to find in the typical skin scraping veterinarians use to find mites because they live really deep down in the skin. When I'm considering scabies in a dog, I know that the chances of isolating the mite under a microscope are pretty small, so I look for bumps on the humans and check if there are any other dogs in the family that are also itching.

I used to think that if only one dog out of four was itching, then there was no possibility of scabies. Years of experience have taught me that one dog can get scabies and other dogs in the household can still behave normally. I also check how intensely the dog is itching. Most dogs with skin allergies itch most intensely when they're bored, but a dog with scabies will stop in the middle of playing or chasing a squirrel and just go at it. A dog may have a very dry, flaking, itching area on the tips of his ears and this is also an important consideration for scabies.

Good observation skills are a necessary part of detecting scabies. Late stage scabies has a particular pattern of thick white crusts on the tips of the ears. Many dogs don't have this in the initial stages as it takes quite a while to develop that crust. However loving dog owners can take such good care of their pooch that the typical signs of scabies never surface, making detection much more difficult.

HOMEOPATHIC TREATMENT AND FOXES

Homeopathic combinations and remedies are commonly given to wild foxes suffering from mange. In the UK, for example, the National Fox Welfare Society sends out hundreds of free treatments (they normally cost about £10 or \$16) every year and uses it successfully to treat foxes taken into their sanctuary in Northamptonshire. The Fox Project in Kent notes similarly spectacular results when treating with 30c potencies, although they point out that it is less successful at treating foxes with more than 30% alopecia.

The British Wildlife Helpline suggests the following treatments for the early stages of mange (patches of missing hair with thinning of the tail):

Sulphur/Arsenicum album combination 30c once daily three weeks

OR *Psorinum* 30c daily for three weeks

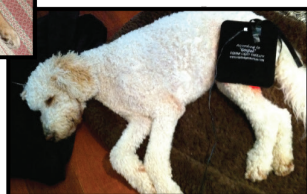
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There are a few options for managing scabies. If you feel the need to quickly rule it out as a cause of your dog's skin issues, then you might choose to treat with Ivermectin right away. It's easy to use and given once a week for four weeks. If your dog is healthy, it's "relatively" non toxic, faster acting and safer than Revolution, but like all pharmaceuticals, it carries risk that you and your vet may want to avoid, especially if you own a collie or similar breed.

There are also several holistic treatment options. Lime Sulphur dips are a safer option and can be used on most dogs but the rotten egg odor results in less owner compliance in the winter months. It is rinsed on your dog and left to dry once a week for several treatments. There are also homeopathic remedies available, the most notable of which is *Psorinum*. This remedy is actually made from scabies discharge. *Sulphur* and *Arsenicum album* are also an option. Your homeopathic vet will help you choose the best remedy or combination for your dog.

Regardless of the treatment you choose, all bedding should be washed and any areas your dog frequents should be thoroughly vacuumed after each treatment. If you have other dogs in your home, you might want to treat them simultaneously or watch them closely for any signs of the mites.

If your dog develops signs of allergies including itching, patchy hair loss or thinning of the tail, remember to always rule scabies out first. 🐾

Since beginning her holistically oriented veterinary practice over 25 years ago, Dr Khalsa has been incorporating homeopathy, acupuncture, Chinese herbs, nutritional advice, allergy-elimination techniques such as NAET and also JMT into her approach. Dr Khalsa is a Fellow and Professor of the British Institute of Homeopathy.