

SkinVetCLINIC

***Malassezia* Dermatitis**

Also known as:

- *Malassezia* skin infection
- yeast infection
- fungal infection

What is *Malassezia*?

Malassezia is the name of a type of yeast (fungus) that lives on the surface of the skin of dogs. It is a normal inhabitant of the ear canal and some other parts of the skin, and in most dogs it does not cause a problem. The yeast lives on substances produced by the skin and likes areas of high moisture. It is the same organism that causes some ear infections.

What is *Malassezia* dermatitis?

Malassezia dermatitis is the condition that occurs when the yeast proliferates excessively on the skin. This occurs most often when the skin is compromised in some way. The skin of dogs with allergies or seborrhea seems particularly prone to allowing an overgrowth of the yeast. Some breeds of dogs are additionally susceptible to *Malassezia* dermatitis. To make matters worse, dogs may develop an “allergy” to *Malassezia*, so even a low number of the yeast can make them very itchy.

Malassezia dermatitis is much less common in cats. However, some cats with allergies or those that are immunocompromised may develop *Malassezia* dermatitis.

Malassezia dermatitis is not always easy to diagnose by the appearance of the skin alone. The most severe form consists of reddened, flaky, greasy, smelly skin that can affect the entire dog. Often the armpits, legs, and neck are most severely affected. The feet and nail beds are the only places affected in some dogs. Some dogs may be itchy and flaky without much redness or smell.

How is *Malassezia* dermatitis diagnosed?

The diagnosis is based on our examination of the skin and a microscopic examination of the material collected from the surface of the skin. This procedure does not require sedation and is not painful.

How is *Malassezia* dermatitis treated?

Malassezia dermatitis is treated with antifungal medications. These can be oral tablets or topical medications. Because the infection tends to recur when the medications are stopped, we usually recommend continuing some form of topical therapy to keep the infection away. We prefer to use antifungal shampoos and conditioners to keep down the numbers of yeast on the skin surface. It is important to leave any shampoo on the skin for at least 10 minutes to allow it to kill the yeast.

Because an underlying skin disorder is necessary for the yeast to overgrow, we may recommend tests to determine the nature of this condition. Whenever possible, we treat the underlying condition to keep the yeast infections from coming back.