

Seborrhea

- *Seborrhea* is a general term used to describe skin and hair that has excessive flaking or grease.
- While primary seborrhea is a rare inherited disease, most cases of seborrhea are secondary to other disease processes such as allergies, external parasites, infections, and glandular or immune system diseases.
- Treatment for the underlying disease may help resolve cases of secondary seborrhea, but primary seborrhea usually requires lifelong treatment.

What Is Seborrhea?

Seborrhea is a general term used to describe skin and hair that has excessive amounts of flakes (like dandruff) and/or grease. In most cases, the term describes the clinical signs, and not a disease itself.

The one exception is primary seborrhea, which is a relatively rare inherited disease in breeds such as cocker spaniels and Persian and Himalayan cats. Pets with primary seborrhea do not produce and shed/replace skin cells normally, or they may have a defect in the function of the glands in their skin. Seborrhea may be limited to one area of the body or may be more generalized.

In most pets, seborrhea describes the clinical signs that are secondary to an underlying disease process. The term *seborrhea sicca* is used to describe dry, flaky skin conditions, and *seborrhea oleosa* is used for greasy, oily (and often smelly), flaky skin.

What Causes Seborrhea?

Primary seborrhea is also known as *idiopathic seborrhea*, meaning the exact cause is not known. Because it occurs commonly in certain breeds, genetics is thought to play a role.

Secondary seborrhea is usually caused by an underlying disease process, such as allergies, bacterial or yeast infections, external parasites, hypothyroidism

(low amounts of thyroid hormone), Cushing's disease (too much adrenal hormone), or immune system diseases.

How Is Seborrhea Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will begin by taking a complete medical history of your pet. He or she will also perform a thorough physical examination.

Most diagnostic tests are designed to help determine the underlying disease condition that results in the signs of seborrhea. Your veterinarian may perform a skin scraping to search for parasites, bacteria, and fungi under the microscope. This involves gently scraping areas of affected skin with a scalpel blade until they bleed slightly. Several skin scrapings are usually done at different affected locations, and the resulting samples of skin cells and debris are mounted on a slide and examined under a microscope.

Your veterinarian may also recommend specific blood tests to check for underlying diseases, such as hypothyroidism and Cushing's disease. In addition, skin cultures or skin biopsies (tissue samples) may be required to pin down a definite diagnosis.

How Is Seborrhea Treated?

Unfortunately, primary seborrhea usually can't be cured, but it can be managed. Treatment may involve a combination of a hypoallergenic diet, vitamin or fatty acid supplements, and antibiotic or antifungal medications to manage secondary skin infections. Medicated shampoos and moisturizers may also be recommended. Pets with primary seborrhea should not be bred, to prevent passing on the disease.

Treatment of secondary seborrhea varies depending on the underlying condition. Once the underlying condition (such as allergies or hypothyroidism) is controlled, the seborrhea may resolve. Medicated shampoos can also be helpful in some cases.