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FELINE MILIARY DERMATITIS or FLEA ALLERGY DERMATITIS

What is feline miliary dermatitis?

Feline miliary dermatitis is a general term used to describe a skin condition in cats that most commonly results from an allergic reaction. Since the most common allergic dermatitis or skin allergy in the cat is flea allergy dermatitis, the two terms have become synonymous. The term *miliary* is defined as 'lesions resembling millet seeds'. Clinically, the patient has a very itchy rash and may lick, bite and scratch at the affected skin. The rash quickly progresses to small lesions with scabs on them, which may be caused by the allergic reaction itself or as the result of self-trauma. The most commonly affected area is along the back and around the base of the tail, but the neck, flanks and belly may also be involved in many cases. The fur often becomes thin in affected areas. In severe cases, the rash becomes infected, which is seen as pustules or "pimple-like" lesions. It is likely that this allergic reaction is uncomfortable since affected cats spend most of their time grooming and scratching the affected areas.



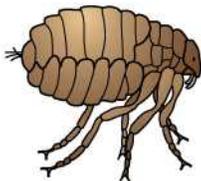
What causes miliary dermatitis?

By far the most common cause of feline miliary dermatitis is an allergy to flea bites. Some cats become extremely sensitive to flea bites and a single bite may be enough to provoke quite a severe skin reaction.

Miliary dermatitis can also represent a reaction to other allergens. Parasites such as Cheyletiella (fur mites or "walking dandruff"), harvest mites, lice and ear mites can be responsible for causing the clinical signs of miliary dermatitis. It can indicate an allergy to something in the cat's diet (food allergy dermatitis) or a response to an inhaled allergen (atopy). Contact allergies or contact dermatitis are another possibility, but this is rare in cats. The most likely contact allergens are synthetic materials such as carpets within the house, and plant materials such as sap or pollen.

How is miliary dermatitis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based primarily on medical history and clinical signs. If fleas or flea dirt are observed or if the cat is not on a flea preventive, the diagnosis is often presumed to be flea allergy. If another cause is suspected, skin scrapings, biopsies, serum IgE allergy tests, a hypoallergenic food trial or a referral to a dermatologist may be recommended.



How is miliary dermatitis treated?

Treatment is directed at removing the offending allergen and reducing the cat's clinical signs. A flea preventive is applied if flea allergy dermatitis is suspected. It is important to note that live fleas are seldom seen on cats. This is due to their fastidious grooming habits. Any first-time case of miliary dermatitis should be treated as flea allergy dermatitis unless proven otherwise. Anti-inflammatory drugs such as corticosteroids are commonly used to make the cat feel more comfortable and reduce the constant itching. Medicated baths, dips or sprays may be used in cases of parasite infection such as cheyletiellosis. A hypoallergenic food trial is recommended in cases suspected of having a food allergy as a component of the allergy.

What is the prognosis for a cat diagnosed with miliary dermatitis?

For most cats, the prognosis is excellent for control. The offending allergen must be removed for long term resolution. Year-round monthly flea preventive is strongly recommended. Most cats respond well to intermittent corticosteroid injections and hypoallergenic diets. Your veterinarian will outline the best treatment protocol for your cat's individual needs.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM
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