

# Children's Resources: Veterinary Dermatology



## Veterinary Specialty of the Day:

### Dermatology

Some veterinarians and veterinary technicians undergo further training to specialize in a specific field of medicine. Veterinarians who specialize in dermatology know how to diagnose and treat conditions that affect an animal's skin, fur, ears, nails, hooves, and mouth. Allergic reactions, infections, or underlying medical conditions can all cause skin problems.

### Discussion Question

- How do you take care of your skin? Why is it important to take care of our skin?

## Veterinary dermatologists are trained to...



#### Identify Skin Problems

Dermatologists can identify the root cause of skin conditions. The animal's medical history, environment, and symptoms (called "clinical signs" in veterinary medicine) are all taken into account.



#### Use Diagnostic Tests

Dermatologists choose appropriate laboratory tests depending on the clinical signs they see. This includes blood tests, allergy tests, or even examinations of the skin cells themselves.



#### Prescribe Treatment Plans

Treatment depends on the type of skin issue the patient has. Treatment could be a specialized diet for an animal with food allergies, a special type of shampoo, or even medication.

## Why so itchy?

Every animal (and person) scratches an itch from time to time, but too much itching or scratching can be a problem. In human and veterinary medicine, that itchy feeling on the skin is called pruritus. Pruritus can have many causes, but a few of the most common ones in cats and dogs are below!



### Parasites

One of the most common parasites on cats and dogs are fleas, which are tiny insects that feed on an animal's blood. Adult fleas are no bigger than a sesame seed and can be hard to spot on your pet's skin. Fleas can lay up to 50 eggs a day and leave droppings (called "flea dirt") as they move around. They can make your pet really itchy, especially if your cat or dog is allergic to the saliva from a flea bite.



### Allergies

Like people, dogs and cats can have allergies. Itchy skin can be a sign of an allergic reaction to something in the environment (such as pollen or mold), to an insect bite, or to a specific type of food. Other signs of an allergic reaction include red skin, swelling, and even difficulty breathing.



### Infections

Infections occur when a microorganism (such as bacteria, a virus, or a fungus) invades an animal's body and causes harm. If a veterinary dermatologist believes an animal has a skin infection, they will take a small skin sample and send it to a lab to figure out what the animal is infected with. A common fungal infection that causes itchy bumps on pets is called "ringworm".

## Activities



### PreK & Up

#### Dramatic Play: Grooming Salon

*Materials: stuffed animals, brush, comb, mirror*

- Animals need to groom themselves in order to stay clean. For a fun dramatic play set-up, create a pretend pet grooming salon in your home!
- You and your child can gather the necessary supplies, such as brushes or combs, to groom their "pet's" fur. Your child can also pretend to trim their stuffed animal's fur and nails while they're at it. Your child should hold up a mirror for their "client" to see how good their new look is!
- If you have a family pet that requires regular brushing, you can teach your child how to safely groom your pet. Remember to supervise your child and remind them to gently run their hand or brush through the animal's fur.

#### Animal Pattern Identification

*Materials: flashcards of animal body coverings*

- Animal body coverings come in lots of different colors, patterns, and textures! Some of these patterns are unique to certain animals.
- Create flashcards of different animal patterns. Examples include tiger and zebra stripes, giraffe and cheetah spots, snake scales, peacock feathers, and more!
- Hold up a flashcard and have your child try to guess the animal that the pattern belongs to.
- Fun Fact! Tiger stripes are not only found on their fur, but on their skin as well.

## Activities



### 1<sup>st</sup> Grade & Up

#### Sunscreen Experiment

*Materials: construction paper, sunscreen with SPF, pen/pencil*

- It's very important for people to wear sunscreen to protect their skin against the sun's UV rays. To demonstrate how sunscreen works, try this fun experiment on the next sunny day.
- Take a piece of construction paper and fold it in half. Have your child place sunscreen on their hands and make a hand print on one side of the paper. Label that side "Sunscreen" and the other "No Sunscreen".
- Let the paper sit outside for a few hours and ask your child if they noticed any changes to the color of the paper.
- The UV rays from the sun will bleach the construction paper, causing the color to fade with the exception of the spot covered with sunscreen.
- For more information on this experiment, check out this blog:  
<https://www.playdoughtoplato.com/kids-science-sunscreen-science/>

#### Additional Resources from the AAD

*Materials: internet access*

- The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) has a section on its website dedicated to teaching kids about healthy habits for their skin. There's even a fun, virtual book on [how animals protect their skin from the sun](#).
- To check out these resources for yourself, visit:  
<https://www.aad.org/public/parents-kids/healthy-habits/parents/kids>

## Activities



### 9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

#### Career Exploration: Veterinary Dermatology

*Materials: computer/tablet/phone with internet access*

- The field of veterinary medicine is huge and there are many job opportunities available to those interested in pursuing a career in the field.
- If your child is interested in a career in dermatology, encourage them to research the various job opportunities and programs that exist.
- Need a place to start? Check out this page from the American College of Veterinary Dermatology: [http://www.acvd.org/tools/faq/default.asp?ids=10\\_FAQ](http://www.acvd.org/tools/faq/default.asp?ids=10_FAQ)

#### References:

<http://www.acvd.org/Default.asp>

<https://www.amcny.org/pet-owners/specialties/dermatology/>

<https://www.avma.org/resources/pet-owners/petcare/external-parasites>

<https://www.merckvetmanual.com/cat-owners/skin-disorders-of-cats>

<https://www.merckvetmanual.com/dog-owners/skin-disorders-of-dogs>