**Holistic Tips for Pet Skin Care**

The skin—including mucous membranes—is the largest organ of the body. We are constantly absorbing anything put on the skin and excreting waste materials through the skin.

The condition of tissues can offer clues to your pet’s overall health. How do your pet’s skin, hair, and mucous membranes look? Is the coat dull, dry, and full of dandruff? Or is it shiny and lustrous? Are the pads of the feet dry and cracked or smooth? Are the delicate tissues around the eyes, in the ears, inside the cheeks, and around the teeth, lips, and nose smooth and pink? Or are they pale, yellow, dry, cracked, or red? Are the toenails brittle and overgrown? Is there any oily residue, crustiness, or odor coming from the skin?

Is your pet itchy? Check for fleas or flea dirt. Fleas are tiny, fast, and more common in the Pacific Northwest than one might imagine—even in winter months. Pets who are sensitive to fleas only need one bite to become itchy and allergic. A dog or cat will often chew a flea off their fur before we never see it. When in doubt, cover your bases using flea control. Sometimes you can find flea dirt, the excretions of the fleas that look like black specks on the fur and skin. If you collect some of these speckles on a wet paper towel, it will turn a rusty red-orange within a couple minutes. This is because the “dirt” is actually dried blood—a flea’s meal!

When fleas are the culprit of skin issues, the first step is acknowledging these critters are pestering your pet. The next step is treating accordingly. Organic, all-natural remedies are available for those who are chemically sensitive, such as using parasite dust on the skin or nematodes in the yard, but these items are not as strong as flea prevention.

If there are no fleas, another parasite, such as mites, could be the issue. Additionally, your pet could be detoxing, or there could be something getting “under the skin” energetically. Some pets can develop behavioral licking or scratching when they are irritated or anxious.

In traditional Chinese veterinary medicine, itchiness can be from from wind, which can be allergic in origin resulting in hives or wheals. It can also be from stagnation in the liver or from heat or dampness in the lungs. Again, this issue is more than just skin deep. To detox the liver or just do a stress detox, spirulina, chlorophyll, oat grass, and greens are helpful.

Food sensitivities are being recognized more commonly as a cause of itchy skin, ears, or feet. Even if you pet has been on the same food for a long time, or if you have tried multiple types of food, there could still be sensitivity to an ingredient in the food and treats. Common food allergens include wheat, corn, grain, protein, treats, and food dye.

To improve coat quality, beneficial fatty acids can be added to the food. These include fish oils, olive oil, sardines, evening primrose oil, borage oil, or black currant oil. Apple cider vinegar can also be added to food or diluted in a spray for the skin to curtail itching.

Keep in mind itchiness could also be a sign of boredom, pain, cystitis, or even arthritis, so be on the lookout for other symptoms.