



Southern Counties

VETERINARY
SPECIALISTS

Canine Flank Alopecia

Information Sheet

**Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists
Specialist Referral Service**



important to look out for any signs of infection in the bald spots which can need extra treatment

Why does Canine Flank Alopecia occur?

The cause is currently unknown but hair loss is most often reported at times of the year when day lengths are the shortest suggesting light exposure may be a factor in its occurrence. The most common months are between November and March, although it can happen to dogs outside of these months too. There are no official causes but it has been thought that the seasons can cause it or that there can be a hereditary influence.

What is Canine Flank Alopecia?

This disorder is not completely understood and causes recurrent hair loss on the flanks (side of the body between the ribs and hips) and along the back area, due to a change in melatonin and prolactin hormone production which affects the hair follicles. Sometimes it can be present under the arms and on the bridge of the nose. It has been described as seasonal flank alopecia however this can be inaccurate due to the condition occurring at any time of the year and can also vary in duration.

What are the signs of Canine Flank Alopecia?

When we give drugs for sedation prior to There will be non-inflammatory, non-itchy hair loss and often the affected area can look normal, but the exposed skin may become darkened in some cases. The hair loss can be continuous taking varying amounts of times to grow back, or sometimes cannot grow back at all in that area. Another variation of this disease is some dogs can only have one cycle of hair loss in their life. Canine flank alopecia can appear on both sides of the dog or can be limited to one side. It is

What animals are effected?

Canine flank alopecia occurs in dogs between the ages of 1 year to 11 years old, although most of the cases have developed between 3 and 6 years old. The breeds it is seen most in are Boxers, Airedale terriers, English bulldogs and Schnauzers.

How is Canine Flank Alopecia investigated by the veterinary surgeon?

It is important to all rule out other diseases which cause hair loss such as bacterial infections, Demodex mite infestations, ringworm infestations, hypothyroidism and Cushing's disease. These can be ruled out through appropriate testing. Hypothyroidism is a condition most confused with flank alopecia but the biggest difference is that the former often presents signs such as lethargy and poor exercise tolerance, whilst a dog with flank alopecia will be otherwise healthy.

Normally canine flank alopecia can be diagnosed using clinical findings through observing the lesions, but biopsies can support the diagnosis of canine flank alopecia.

What treatment options are available?

The administration of melatonin can be helpful in encouraging hair growth and hair thickness in some dogs, and this is given orally every day for 2 or 3 months until the hair is completely grown back. To prevent hair loss prior to an anticipated onset of hair loss the melatonin can be given 4 to 6 weeks before it occurs. It is important to always follow your vet's advice when taking medications.

Although in healthy dogs, many do re-grow their hair so it is not always necessary to treat the condition. But in cases of treatment melatonin is the usual choice because it is relatively safe and inexpensive – the only downside is it can be difficult to predict the response to medication as hair re-growth can occur spontaneously. With the suggestion that seasons can bring on

canine flank alopecia it could be important that during the darker seasons dogs are given more opportunity to be outdoors in the daytime.

What is the prognosis for my pet?

It is difficult to predict the prognosis for hair growth because hair growth can be incomplete and new hairs can come through different colours or texture to the dog's normal coat. However, this cosmetic disorder does not affect the quality of life for the dog and the dog remains healthy even with unpredictable hair growth. Due to the disease being so variable it is difficult to suggest a prognosis but full and normal hair re-growth should occur, but in some cases hair may skip a growth cycle or the dog may never regain the hair.





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