

Derm Digest

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Animal Dermatology Clinic

Advancing the Art of Veterinary Dermatology

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Demodex in Cats Unusual feline ailment



This ragdoll cat sought relief of his itching by excessive grooming as evidenced in this photo.

Demodicosis, or demodectic mange, is a skin disease caused by a type of demodex mite not visible to the naked eye. Dogs are more often affected by demodex mites while it is a rare disorder in cats.

Mites are commonly found on the normal skin of mammals. However, when the immune system is compromised through stress or illness, the demodex population may become excessive, leading to skin and hair problems.

A mite lives within the follicle of the hair and is detected by a skin scrape. The doctor will use a scalpel blade to scrape the skin of the pet and then place that material on a glass slide and look for mites with the aid of a microscope.

As previously mentioned, mites are normally found on the skin but in very low numbers. So, it is significant to find them on skin scrape. It would be the proverbial "needle in the haystack".

(continued page 2)

Why Are Jerky Treats Making Pets Sick?

The Food and Drug Administration continues their investigation to uncover the cause for dogs and cats becoming ill after eating jerky pet treats. Since 2007 the FDA has received a large number of reports from consumers involving 3,600 and 10 cats in the United States. Approximately 580 of those pets have died.

The FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine has conducted more than 1,200 diagnostic tests, visited jerky pet treat manufacturers in China and worked closely with colleagues in academia, industry, state labs and foreign governments. The majority of the suspected jerky treats have come from China with reports of some from the United States. Although U.S. pet food manufacturers are not required by law to state the country of origin for each ingredient in their products.

Within hours of eating treats sold as jerky tenders or strips made of chicken, duck, sweet potatoes and/or dried fruit, some pets have exhibited decreased appetite, decreased activity, vomiting, diarrhea (sometimes with blood or mucus), increased water consumption, and/or increased urination.

Severe cases have involved kidney failure and gastrointestinal bleeding. About 60 percent of cases involved gastrointestinal illness, and about 30 percent involved kidney and urinary systems. The remaining cases reported various symptoms, such as collapse, convulsions or skin issues.

In January 2013 a number of jerky treats were removed from the market when a study conducted by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Marketing detected low levels of antibiotic residues in those products. FDA believes that the low availability of the treats affected the fewer problems being reported, yet pet owners are still reporting of pets' illnesses from jerky treats.

FDA continues to caution pet owners that jerky pet treats are not required for a balanced diet. The agency encourages pet owners to consult with their veterinarian prior to feeding treats and if they notice symptoms in their pets. 🐾

Source: Food and Drug Administration

Demodex in Cats, continued



Microscopic image of *Demodex gatoi*, one of the mites that affect cats.

But when certain symptoms are exhibited and the doctor can detect mites in skin scrape, then treatment is initiated to eradicate them.

Symptoms of demodicosis include hair loss around the eyelids, head, neck and flank. Lesions on the skin, scales and crusty patches may occur. Itchiness may be present.

There are two species of mites that more commonly cause demodicosis in cats. *Demodex gatoi* is contagious and may be transmitted between cats in the same household. *Demodex cati* and is associated with diseases of the immune and metabolic systems.

After initial treatment, although symptoms may appear to be abating, follow up care should include additional skin scrapings to verify a reduction of mite population. With chronic long-term cases of demodectic mange in cats, regular medication may be necessary. 🐾

“If animals could speak, the dog would be a blundering outspoken fellow; but the cat would have the rare grace of never saying a word too much.”

— Mark Twain



After treatment, hair growth has returned to the abdomen. Follow up care will include additional skin scraping to prove a reduction in the mite population.

We all got mites!

Mites are specific to mammals, for cats it is *demodex gatoi* and *demodex cati*. Dogs have a different mite, *demodex canis*.

Humans have mites that live on their faces. You read that correctly...we have mites on our face. *Demodex folliculorum* and *d. brevis* are two species specific to humans and live on humans alone.

Demodex is derived from the Greek words ‘demo’ meaning lard and ‘dex’ meaning boring worm. The worm that bores into fat. But not to worry, these mites stay on the surface of our bodies, not bore into them. Whew!