

Otitis Externa

Miliary dermatitis is a general term used to describe any condition in which there are small bumps (about the size of millet seeds) on the cat's skin. Miliary dermatitis is most often caused by an allergic reaction, most commonly seen as a reaction to flea bites.

In cats that become extremely sensitive to flea bites, a single bite may lead to a severe skin reaction. Other less common causes of miliary dermatitis include Cheyletiella mites (fur mites or "walking dandruff") and other allergies (eg, to pollens, specific foods, etc).

Symptoms:

The first sign of miliary dermatitis in cats is an itchy rash that quickly progresses to small lesions covered by scabs. These lesions can result from the allergic reaction itself or can be a result of the cat licking, biting, and scratching the itchy skin. Miliary dermatitis is most common along the back and around the base of the tail, although the neck, sides, and belly can also be involved. The fur often becomes thin and broken. In severe cases, the scabby "millet seeds" can become infected and develop into "pimple-like" pustules.

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis is based primarily on the history and clinical signs. The cause is often assumed to be flea allergy until proven otherwise. Your veterinarian may recommend additional diagnostic tests, including skin scrapings, skin biopsies, allergy tests, or a trial diet with a reduced allergen type diet. In some cases, your vet may refer you to a veterinary dermatologist or a veterinary teaching hospital.

Treatment:

Treatment is directed at removing the problem allergens and relieving your cat's discomfort. If your cat is not on a monthly flea preventive, your vet will likely recommend starting one. Anti-inflammatory medications such as corticosteroids can be used on a short-term basis to reduce the itchiness and make your cat more comfortable. Medicated baths or sprays may be needed in cases of infection. Sometimes essential oils can be beneficial in keeping your cat comfortable.