

Seasonal Flank Alopecia

What seasonal flank alopecia?

Alopecia is the medical term for hair loss. This means that the hair is falling out, not being licked or chewed off by the dog. With seasonal flank alopecia, a dog loses hair in the flank area on a seasonal basis. Different dogs seem to choose different seasons to lose their hair (fall and spring are popular) and when the season changes the hair generally grows back. Sometimes a dog will skip a season only to lose hair again the next year. Any dog can have seasonal flank alopecia, but it is most common in medium to large short-coated dog. Boxers and English bulldogs are the most common breeds to develop this condition.

What does it look like?

The hair loss is generally confined to the flanks (sides of the back just ahead of the rear legs). The skin typically is darkly pigmented in the areas of hair loss. Both flanks are generally affected symmetrically. There is no itchiness involved with the hair loss. Sometimes the hair re-grows in a different color than the original hair. Some dogs only re-grow the hair in patches and rarely some never re-grow their hair.

Why does this Happen?

At this time no one knows why this occurs. It is felt to be a hormonal problem disrupting hair follicles.

How is it diagnosed?

Seasonal flank alopecia is usually easily diagnosed by history and clinical presentation. There are certain endocrine diseases (hyperadrenocorticism and hypothyroidism) that can have skin lesions similar to flank alopecia, but these diseases also have other clinical signs, where-as flank alopecia only involves hair loss. Your veterinarian will take a full history and perform a thorough physical exam to rule-out the possibility of an endocrine disease. If an endocrine disease is suspected, blood work will be run to detect these diseases.

Should I be concerned?

No. Once we are sure it is indeed just seasonal flank alopecia there is absolutely no need to be concerned. This syndrome is not related to any other disease process and causes absolutely no harm or discomfort to your dog.

Is there Treatment?

Melatonin, a natural biochemical that is important in the regulation of circadian (daily) rhythms, has been used successfully in many patients. We are not sure why melatonin helps re-grow hair in some dogs. This product is available as an over the counter dietary supplement. It is most often used as a sleep aid in people and the only known side effect is drowsiness. Dosing regimens must be obtained from the veterinarian treating the dog in question.