

Dermatomyositis

Also Known As: A form of ischemic dermatopathy

Affected Animals: Most commonly seen in young Shetland sheepdogs and Collies and mixes of these breeds. Other breeds are more rarely affected.

Overview: Dermatomyositis is an immune-mediated hereditary disorder that causes inflammation of the skin, muscles, and blood vessels. The disease typically occurs in dogs less than 6 months of age. Severity of symptoms vary from mild to debilitating, and in some dogs the symptoms will spontaneously resolve, while others may require life-long treatment. Trauma and prolonged sun exposure can worsen the skin lesions of dermatomyositis.

Clinical Signs: Common skin lesions include hair loss, redness, crusting, and scarring. More severe cases can also involve eroded or ulcerated areas of skin. Typical affected areas include the face, feet, ears, tail, oral cavity, and paw pads.

Signs of muscle involvement can be variable. Some dogs may be unaffected, while some may have only jaw or facial muscle atrophy, and others may experience generalized muscle loss. Some dogs may become weak, have trouble walking, experience difficulty swallowing, and may even develop megaesophagus, which can cause regurgitation.

Diagnosis: Dermatomyositis is diagnosed based on clinical signs, biopsy of skin and/or muscle, and occasionally specialized testing of electrical muscle function (EMG)

Treatment: Medical management of dermatomyositis will vary depending on the severity. Secondary bacterial and/or yeast skin infections should be treated with appropriate antimicrobials. Animals may be managed with anti-inflammatories, antibiotics, and/or immunosuppressive treatment that includes varying combinations of steroids and other medications.

Prognosis: The prognosis is variable depending on the severity of the disease. Some mild cases will go unnoticed and spontaneously resolve while others may require lifelong management and result in significant scarring. Severe cases of dermatomyositis with muscle involvement may result in a poor prognosis for long-term survival.

Prevention: Since this disease is hereditary, affected dogs should not be bred.