

Vet's Corner

Skin Health & Bald Thigh Syndrome in Greyhounds

The skin is the largest organ of the body, although people tend not to think of it as an organ. It provides a physical barrier between the animal and the environment, covering the exterior of the body and contains a variety of glands, nerves, blood vessels, and muscles. It has a number of built in adaptive mechanisms that protect the dog from cold (hair stands on end, trapping air to act as an insulating blanket,) and excess internal heat production, (skin blood vessels dilate to release excess heat into the environment.) It prevents bacterial invasion into the body, and helps sense changes in the environment by nerve receptors that detect changes in touch, pressure and temperature. It prevents loss of water and other internal constituents such as proteins and electrolytes (salts) and finally, it acts as a reservoir for electrolytes, water, vitamins, fats, carbohydrates and proteins. In fact, it is often an indicator of the animal's general health.

There are two basic layers to the skin, the outer epidermis, and the deeper dermis. The epidermis is a layer of cells that are responsible for making new skin cells to replace those that are constantly being shed into the environment.

The dermis is made up largely of a protein called collagen and provides the epidermis with support and nourishment. It contains the blood vessels that supply the skin, the sensory nerves that monitor the environment, the hair follicles that produce the hair coat and oil and sweat glands.

The hair coat acts as a protective physical barrier against injury as well as helping regulate body temperature. Hair does not grow continuously but rather in cycles, with a growing period when hair is actively growing, and a "rest" period when the hair is retained in the follicle as a "dead" hair that is subsequently shed. The hair cycle is controlled by ambient temperature, seasons, nutrition, hormones, genetics and general state of health. Because hair

is mainly protein, nutrition has a marked effect on both quantity and quality, poor nutrition can result in dull, dry, brittle hair coats and even skin disease. Nutrients most commonly lacking when the coat is dull are essential fatty acids (omega 3 & 6), Vitamins A & E and zinc. The premium dog food "Nutrience" is well balanced in all these factors and the majority of dogs will thrive on this food. Occasionally an individual dog will need more of these nutrients than are present even in "Nutrience". Supplements such as "My Beau" or "Exceed" are useful additives to the diet of such dogs.

Greyhounds with "Bald Thigh Syndrome" have a history of normal hair distribution when first brought in to work but show a progressive loss of hair from the back and sides of the thighs after about 4 weeks into a full work program. Hair loss may also occur on the sides of the chest behind the elbows and on the bottom of the chest.

The dog shows no signs of illness but there is progressive hair loss which is non-inflammatory and not itchy, and greyhounds of any age or gender can be affected. The condition is believed to be due to a hormone imbalance caused by the stress of racing. This causes a reduced production of thyroid hormones and a chronic overproduction of adrenal hormones (corticosteroids), which have a negative effect on the production of thyroid hormones.

In racing dogs, supplementation with thyroxin is considered an essential part of the treatment regime, whereas dogs that have retired from racing will generally regrow a healthy coat after 1-3 months away from racing. Providing soft bedding also promotes hair growth, as often these dogs sleep on concrete or in crates during their career, which rubs away at the coat and prevents new growth.

Dr Malcolm L Jansen BVSc



"Many people who are allergic to dogs are not allergic to greyhounds due to their short, sleek coat and skin type"



Yahoo Group

GAP CHAT

If you're not already a member then come and join us at www.groups.yahoo.com/group/nzgreyhoundsaspets, the online forum for discussing all things greyhound. We now have 73 members, most of whom have an ex-racer as a pet, and regularly get online to share stories and photos, as well as advice and organise get-togethers. Anyone with an interest in ex-racing greyhounds will enjoy this site, we look forward to seeing you there!

For those of you with a knack for naming, there is a website www.mike-maguire.com/Names.html This lists the 50 most common names for greyhounds.