

Daisy... the dog copying the cat (Sebastian)



Ears crusted and ulcerated



Ulcers and crusts around nose and eyes



Daisy on the first day we met her



Shallow ulcers and severely thickened skin in flank fold



Very thickened crusted and sore perineum (under tail)

Daisy is an 8 year old spayed mixed breed dog. She has a long history of allergic skin disease. For 2-3 months prior to her referral her skin had worsened considerably, starting with severe thickening, crusting and ulceration of the skin in the right flank fold and under her tail and a marked increase in her itch. In recent weeks, crusts and sores started developing over the face and limbs. Walking became painful, she wouldn't allow you to touch her feet and she went off her food.

Her owners couldn't afford biopsies but when we found the acantholytic acanthocytes (see Sebastian's report) in sample collected from those little white pustules in the photo on the right, we were pretty convinced that she too was suffering from pemphigus foliaceus. Those white blobs have very thin walls and break easily – so you have to be very lucky to see them. Daisy started on prednisolone treatment and was feeling much better within days.



Sterile pustules – the definitive pemphigus lesion



Daisy after 2 weeks' treatment



Pemphigus foliaceus is one of the autoimmune blistering diseases that affect the skin and is the most common one that affects dogs. It usually affects middle aged - older dogs. A subset have had long standing allergic skin disease prior to developing pemphigus (11.6% and 37.5% in two case series). Treatment centres around suppressing the immune system with steroids (like prednisolone). Other drugs like azathioprine may be added if the steroids alone don't cause enough of an improvement or in an attempt to decrease side effects from the steroids.

In most cases immunosuppression results in improvement and / or resolution of signs. Some dogs may be weaned off treatment over several months, others need lifelong treatment. There is no information on what proportion of affected dogs can be weaned off treatment completely. Depending on the case study, 10-30% of dogs are put to sleep either because the treatment is unable to control the disease or because treatment causes unacceptable side effects (eg pancreatitis, weakness, breathlessness - or bone marrow suppression if azathioprine treatment is not appropriately monitored)