



Banbury-Bedrock Bull Terriers

ALLERGY ADVICE

Owners of unfortunate dogs who suffer skin allergies often find themselves wringing their hands over what to do. First, the inflammation and itching cycle must be broken, which is generally done with prescriptions for prednisone (a cortisone drug that controls the inflammation and reduces the itch), and an antibiotic that controls the bacterial infection in the skin. Infection often follows due to the damage the skin suffers from scratching and inflammation. While the dog is under treatment for the symptoms, the owner needs to go one step further and try to figure out what changes in the dog's environment have recently occurred to trigger the allergic reaction. During the summer months there are several usual suspects.

1. Insects: Summer is the bad season for fleas. Dogs are allergic to the bite of the flea which punctures the dog's skin when it feeds and leaves a residue of saliva under the dog's skin. This results in a little red welt which itches like crazy once a dog has become flea-allergic. One flea can be enough to trigger a wide allergic reaction. Get advice from your vet on eradicating fleas from your pet's body and environment. Fleas also lay eggs in blankets and cracks in furniture and floors which can hatch out weeks after your dog has a flea bath, and the infestation starts all over again. You must treat the environment several times to get rid of the late hatches. Gnats and biting flies are another cause of allergic reactions. If your dog is outside for any length of time during the summer months, he has no protection from these obnoxious pests. The inside of the ears and the back are the usual targets, also around the sheath of the male dogs. There are many insect repellents available that are safe for dogs--check with your vet. These should be put on the ears (both sides) and along the back of the dog before he goes out. Avon "Skin So Soft" is a product that seems to work pretty well for us. Products that kill the insects when they bite the dog are not effective for flies and gnats. Once they have bitten, the damage is done to the dog and whether or not the gnat dies subsequently is of no real satisfaction. Caution: What you spray or wipe on as a repellent may also cause allergic reactions so be sure it is safe and non-toxic.

2. Grasses and Weeds: Some dogs are allergic to grasses and weeds in certain stages of pollination and seeding. If you notice that your dog's feet become red and swollen between the toes, it is probably due to something he is walking on. Try exercising him on a sidewalk or a paved street and keeping him off the grass for several weeks and see if it makes a difference. Remember that pavement can get very hot in the summer sun, so exercise early in the morning or after dark in hot climates. It is often only for a month or so of the year that grass allergies affect a dog, so it is worth figuring out and changing the environment for these few months, if you can. Rubbing some "Panalog" cream daily between the toes and around the pads often relieves the allergic symptoms and will stop the chewing and licking. "Panalog" has cortisone, antibiotic and antifungal agents in it and can be very useful for unhappy skin.

3. Diet: Rashes, hives and chronic allergic problems can often be traced to foodstuffs that are added to the daily basic ration of kibble. The more elaborate the diet, the harder it is to figure out what is causing the problem. In many cases, removing dairy products from the diet has a miraculous effect. Some kibble contains cheese, milk, whey or other dairy derivatives--you can check this out on the label of the kibble bag. If you suspect food allergies, you can put your dog on a basic diet of kibble only for a few weeks. Once the skin has returned to normal add a little meat. After a few weeks you can add one thing, i.e., oil or egg, or whatever else you feel is necessary for your dog's health and happiness, leaving two or three weeks between each addition. If he breaks out again, it is probably due to the latest addition. If you feed a good quality kibble that is not too high in protein (24% to 26% is high enough) add a little meat (canned, without gravy, sugar or other additives, or cook your own chicken, beef or lamb), this is really all your dog needs to lead a healthy life. More elaborate diets can be used if you have the time AND you aren't having allergic problems with some components.

4. Detergents and Chemicals: In the summer months, many suburban lawns and all golf courses are treated with herbicides and pesticides to keep them approaching perfection in appearance. There is a high correlation rate between exposure to these lawn care products and malignant lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system, as well as other cancerous diseases. If your dog is exposed to these substances, he may easily become a statistic, so you have to figure out a way to keep him in a clear environment. It is not enough to just keep him off the grass for a few days after it has been treated. Laundry detergents can be irritating to the skin. Use mild soaps to wash your dog's bedding and other material that he comes in contact with. Rinse twice before drying. DO NOT use dryer additives to make blankets fluffy. These can be very irritating and trigger an allergic response. Also beware of sprays that claim to disinfect and remove odors. If your dog is brushed regularly and his bedding washed occasionally, this should keep obnoxious odors to a minimum. If you must bathe him, use a mild shampoo and rinse thoroughly. After all, he is a dog and will probably smell like one from time to time. Other chemicals to be wary of are carpet cleaners and chemicals actually used in the manufacture of some synthetic fabrics and carpets. If your dog has suddenly broken out in hives or a rash, think whether you have just put in new carpet somewhere in the house (or shampooed your carpet), changed slipcovers or upholstery on his chair, or given him a new sheet, blanket or pad to sleep on. This could be the culprit! Sometimes allergies are a combination of stressors, and a dog which was coping with one or two allergens such as a dairy product in his diet or a detergent residue on his blanket suddenly confronts an additional stressor, such as clover pollen in the lawn and this tips the balance, the body can't cope and he has an allergic reaction. A simple diet, a soap- and chemical- free environment, and effective control of fleas and biting insects is a pretty sure bet to keep allergic reactions at a minimum--and your vet bills ditto!