

EROSIONS OR ULCERS OF THE SKIN (EROSIVE OR ULCERATIVE DERMATOSES)

BASICS

OVERVIEW

- Erosions are shallow defects in the skin, which only affect the skin's upper layers; erosions can be quite painful, but tend to heal quickly if protected (and the underlying cause is eliminated)
- Ulcers are deeper defects in the skin, where the surface layers are compromised completely; ulcers require careful wound care to prevent infection, and tend to heal slowly
- Erosive or ulcerative dermatoses are a group of dissimilar skin disorders, characterized by the presence of erosions or ulcers

SIGNALMENT/DESCRIPTION of ANIMAL

Species

- Dogs and cats

SIGNS/OBSERVED CHANGES in the ANIMAL

- Depend on cause
- Erosions or ulcers; they may be found anywhere on the body
- Hair loss (known as "alopecia")
- Single or multiple lesions; lesions may be inflamed (indicated by redness)
- May see lesions over pressure points (such as skin over bones)
- May have dried discharge on the surface of a skin lesion (known as a "crust") or may have moist discharge
- May have loss of pigment of skin and/or hair (known as "depigmentation")

CAUSES

- Wide variety of diseases may result in erosions or ulcers of the skin; common causes are burns, trauma, and skin infections; more complicated diseases, such as drug reactions, certain types of cancers, autoimmune diseases of the skin, and viruses also may cause erosions or ulcers that appear identical to burns or trauma—your pet's veterinarian may need to run a battery of tests (including blood work, cultures for different types of infections, and skin biopsies) to identify the cause and prescribe proper treatment
- In some cases, an underlying cause cannot be identified and the cause is "unknown," so called "idiopathic" disorder or disease
- Partial list of disorders that cause erosions or ulcers of the skin include the following:

Immune-Mediated Disorders

- Inflammation of blood vessels (known as "vasculitis")
- Canine juvenile cellulitis (puppy strangles)
- Toxic epidermal necrolysis (usually medication-induced)
- Feline indolent ulcer (rodent ulcer)
- Pemphigus, an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks the skin

Infectious Disorders

- Skin infection characterized by the presence of pus (known as "pyoderma") caused by *Staphylococcus*
- Deep fungal or mycotic infections (such as sporotrichosis, cryptococcosis, histoplasmosis)
- Superficial fungal infections (*Malassezia* dermatitis, dermatophytosis)
- Actinomycetic bacteria (such as *Nocardia*, *Actinomyces*, *Streptomyces*)
- Feline cow pox
- Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV)-related disease

Parasitic Disorders

- Demodectic mange (demodicosis)
- Sarcoptic or notoedric mange
- Flea-bite allergy

Congenital/Hereditary Disorders

- Various skin disorders in which the skin is abnormal at birth (that is, a "congenital" abnormality) that may or may not be inherited

Metabolic Disorders

- Excessive production of steroids by the adrenal glands (known as "hyperadrenocorticism" or "Cushing's disease"), especially when complicated by secondary infections or calcium deposits in the skin (known as "calcinosis cutis")

Cancer

- Squamous cell carcinoma
- Mast cell tumors
- Lymphoma of the skin ("mycosis fungoides")

Nutritional Disorder

- Zinc-responsive dermatosis
- Generic dog-food dermatosis

Miscellaneous

- Thermal, electrical, solar, or chemical burns
- Frost bite
- Chemical irritants
- Venomous snake and insect bites

RISK FACTORS

- Depend on underlying cause

TREATMENT

HEALTH CARE

- Outpatient for most diseases
- Varies widely according to the cause
- Keeping eroded or ulcerated skin clean and protected are key to healing; if the cause is known, specific drug therapies may be prescribed
- Your veterinarian will tailor a management program that is best for your pet's individual case
- Hydrotherapy, which may be achieved with either a whirlpool bath or by spraying cool water under pressure against the ulcerated skin can be helpful in many cases; ask your pet's veterinarian first to be sure that hydrotherapy is appropriate for your pet's condition
- Avoid the temptation to apply "over-the-counter" creams and ointments to erosions and ulcers, without first checking with your veterinarian—some commonly used products (such as those containing neomycin) actually may delay healing in some cases; other products may contain types of alcohol or other ingredients that could cause pain upon application

DIET

- Supportive therapy with fluid and nutritional supplementation is indicated in cases with severe fluid and protein loss through the damaged skin
- Good quality diet

SURGERY

- Skin biopsy may be necessary for diagnosis

MEDICATIONS

- Vary widely according to cause

FOLLOW-UP CARE

PATIENT MONITORING

- Case-by-case basis, depending on the disease process, presence of generalized (systemic) disease(s), medications used, and potential side effects expected
- Follow-up care is important, especially for slowly healing ulcers; a veterinarian should check progress of the wound at least every-other-week to be sure that healing is proceeding properly, and that infection has not complicated the healing process

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Depend on cause
- Some diseases are potentially life-threatening
- Some diseases are caused by agents that may be spread to people (known as having "zoonotic potential")
- Superinfections and drug side effects are possible in cases requiring medications to decrease the body's immune response (known as "immunosuppression")
- Some infectious diseases (such as nocardiosis, atypical mycobacteriosis) may be controlled, but not cured

EXPECTED COURSE AND PROGNOSIS

- Vary widely according to cause

KEY POINTS

- Wide variety of diseases may result in erosions or ulcers of the skin; common causes are burns, trauma, and skin infections; more complicated diseases, such as drug reactions, certain types of cancers, autoimmune diseases of the skin, and viruses also may cause erosions or ulcers that appear identical to burns or trauma—your pet's veterinarian may need to run a battery of

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