

Benign Skin Tumors in Dogs

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BASIC INFORMATION

Description

Several types of benign skin tumors can develop from skin structures in the dog. *Sebaceous adenomas* are growths involving the sebaceous glands (those glands that produce sebum or a waxy substance for the skin and coat) and the ducts. *Sebaceous epitheliomas* are growths that develop from only a part of the gland, called *basal cells*. *Sebaceous gland nodular hyperplasia* is a small bump that occurs when the entire gland grows larger and pushes up through the surface of the skin.

Another group of benign tumors, called *hair follicle tumors*, can arise within the hair follicle or hair shaft.

Causes

It is not known why these normal skin structures develop into benign skin tumors.

Clinical Signs

Sebaceous growths are common in older dogs, especially in the cocker spaniel, Siberian husky, miniature poodle, black and tan coonhound, beagle, and dachshund. Sebaceous tumors are uncommon in the cat, but Persian cats may develop them more often than others. These tumors can occur alone or in small groups, are often yellow-pink in color, and are shaped like a cauliflower. They often have a wart-like appearance. Adenomas are small to medium in size (usually less than ½ inch). Epitheliomas are often larger; they may be fingerlike projections or flatlike adenomas. They vary in size from quite small to inches across.

Nodular hyperplasia bumps can resemble sebaceous adenomas or epitheliomas. They usually have a greasy scab on the surface but rarely bother the pet unless they are located between the toes, under the collar, or in some area where they can become irritated. Sometimes, the waxy substance produced may be irritating if it sits on the surface for a while. Some dogs develop dozens of these bumps over their entire body.

Benign hair follicle tumors can range from less than 1 inch to the size of a golf ball or an orange. They often are partially hairless, and if one looks closely, a central depression can usually be seen on the surface. Some of these lesions rupture, exuding gray-white, thick material that may resemble pus but is really material from the hair follicle. The tumors usually occur in middle- to older-aged pets. Some commonly affected breeds are the German shepherd dog, poodles, Kerry blue terrier, Old English sheepdog, and keeshond.

Diagnostic Tests

Removal and biopsy of the tumor allows the exact type to be identified but may not be recommended if the tumor is causing no signs. An aspirate of the mass may be recommended to rule out other skin tumors of similar appearance.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

There may be no need to remove many of these tumors unless they bother the pet or the owner, especially since they usually only cause cosmetic problems. If the tumor bothers the pet, becomes irritated and inflamed, ruptures, or bleeds often, removal may be recommended. Removal may also be recommended for certain sebaceous epitheliomas.

Follow-up Care

Usually, if the tumor is completely removed, no follow-up is required. Most dogs continue to develop more of these tumors throughout their adult lifetime.

Prognosis

The prognosis is good for most of these tumors, because they are benign growths. In rare instances, the sebaceous epithelioma can behave more aggressively and recur at the surgery site or spread elsewhere.