



THERE'S CAT HAIR ON YOUR...

FIVE REASONS FOR EXCESSIVE SHEDDING

BY SANDRA MURPHY

Some days it seems as if the cat flings fur at your black suit like a porcupine flings quills at an enemy. Everybody sheds but when your cat begins to shed an excessive amount of hair—and not replace it—it's time to do a little investigating.

Hair loss is a symptom of an underlying problem. It's our job to find and fix it. Is his fur shiny and soft or dry and brittle? Are there patchy bald spots from pulled out hair or is she smooth and silky? Genetics, illness, nutrition, environment and stress all play a role in your cat's overall health and can affect the condition of his coat.

You can't always know a cat's genetic traits, especially an adopted cat, but some breeds are more prone to illness or allergy than others. Check online, with a rescue group or a breeder to see if they're familiar with your cat's symptoms.

A trip to the veterinarian for a checkup is in order. What the vet looks for—can your cat process the protein in her food, are there hormonal problems or thyroid concerns? Your veterinarian should check for fleas and other parasites. Blood tests may not pinpoint the answer but could rule out a number of causes.

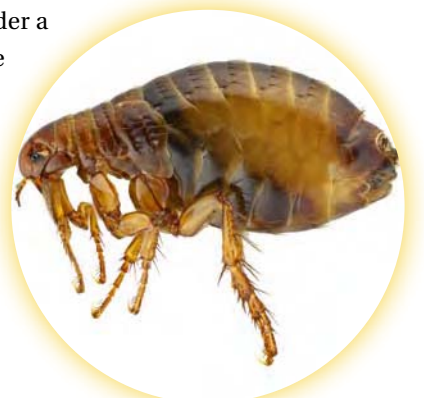
Allergies are harder to pin down and may take some research on your part. One of the easiest things to try is a change of diet. If your cat has been eating the same food for years, he may have become sensitive to one or more of the ingredients. It will take



trial and error to find out. Read the label on all foods. Look for ingredients you recognize—chicken or other meats should be listed first. Key words to avoid are by-products, ground meal, gluten, artificial colors and grains like corn or wheat. Fewer fillers and grains, more natural ingredients, the better for your cat—he'd also enjoy a home cooked diet as a change from the bag or the can.

Make sure your cat gets enough water. Most cats get needed fluids from their food, not the water bowl. A raw food diet isn't always convenient or appealing. Instead, consider a dehydrated or freeze dried food with the proper balance of meat and vegetables (about 90% meat, 10% vegetables and fruits). Rehydrating adds the needed fluids. "The diet should be changed slowly. Start with 75% of the current food mixed in with 25% of the new. Every couple of days add more of the new and less of the old. The process can take up to two or three weeks," says Jodi Ziskin, holistic nutrition and wellness consultant. "During this time, the body will be going through a detox or 'healing crisis.' Your cat may shed a bit more as the body rids itself of toxins. This can last for several days but when it's over, your cat will have a shiny, healthy coat."

When your cat's shedding problem is food related, he may need supplements to jump start his improvement. Ziskin suggests, "Add an Omega 3 oil to whatever





diet you choose. There are wild salmon oils on the market, made for cats and dogs, or you can use cod liver oil, organic first cold pressed flaxseed oil, or borage oil. Another wonderful oil that is becoming quite popular is Emu oil. It can be used both internally and externally.”

As with all of us, environment is a major factor in your cat’s health. What’s new? A change in fabric softener, floor wax or carpet shampoo, air freshener, candles, your own bath soap or body lotion can trigger an allergy in your cat. Food manufacturers bring out new and improved versions of an old and trusted food—what did they change? College age children home for a visit may be using a different brand of laundry soap than your cat is used to. Paint, new carpet, glue, and even new cat toys might contribute to the hairy problem.

Stress is a likely culprit as the reason for shedding. Follow your cat around to see where he’s been hanging out, rig a web cam to observe him when you’re gone, or use a sound activated recorder to see if daytime noises are the problem.

Holistic practitioners look at the big picture. Some analyze your cat’s hair to see if there are heavy metal or mineral imbalances. The non-invasive procedure can reveal information from the past three or four months. Dr. Paul McCutcheon says, “Look at everything. Routine checkups will not uncover stress problems which may be emotional, environmental or a product of a poor diet.” The absence of a child off to school for the first time can stress your cat just as much as a more obvious reason like thunderstorm season. A stray cat, seen through the window, has stressed many an indoor cat.

Even if you suspect a little smirk on your cat’s face as white hair jumps to your black pants, shedding is not a planned event but a symptom of a larger problem. Finding the cause is the hardest part. Think of it as a challenge—follow the clues with the zeal of the Pink Panther to your cat’s optimum health and long life. 🐾

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