Summer brings warm humid weather along with an increase in skin problems in dogs. Ticks and fleas are abundant in our climate and may be cause pets to be itchy. However, other “critters” such as bacteria, fungus and mites can also cause pets to scratch. Our UW Veterinary Care Dermatology Service can help determine the cause of an animal’s scratching but they may need to look below the surface of the skin.

Pyoderma or skin infection is caused by bacteria. Signs of this condition include scratching, lesions or pustules on the skin and may include hair loss. The usual treatment for skin infections includes swabbing the skin to determine what type of organism is causing the problem. The pet is then prescribed medication appropriate for treating that particular type of bacteria. Unfortunately, the infection often returns or the bacteria develop a resistance to the antibiotic.

The UW Veterinary Care Dermatology Service is investigating the use of a vaccine to treat patients with staphylococcal (a type of bacteria) skin infections. Patients enrolled in the study will receive either the vaccine or a placebo. After the initial exam, all other visits and tests are provided at no charge. More info: uwveterinarycare.wisc.edu/clinical-studies/dermatology/

Why Placebos and Controls?
A placebo is a harmless medication that mimics a medication but has no effect on a patient. It is often used in “blind” studies where the patient/client and often the treating veterinarian do not know if a patient is receiving the medicated treatment or the placebo. This provides a comparison between patients receiving a treatment and those not treated but keeping everything else the same. For example, if 100 patients are in a study, 50 may randomly receive the treatment and the others the placebo. All patients receive the same laboratory tests, exams, etc. At the end of the study, the patients’ response or lack of response to treatment are compared. Testing is done to check for effects caused by the medicated treatment compared to patients receiving the placebo.

A “blind” study takes into account the “placebo effect” where owners note improvements just because the patient is receiving a “medication” or extra care due to being in a study. Clients expect results, so observe improvement even when the pet is not receiving any new treatment.

Patients used as “controls” may receive a placebo treatment or a standard treatment. Control patients may be a healthy population of a certain breed to determine the likelihood of developing a certain condition. They may also be patients affected by a disease and randomly receive a placebo instead of a medicated treatment. Both sets of patients are very important to help determine the effectiveness of treatment while advancing knowledge of medical conditions.
Cat and Seizures
Reliable administration of anti-seizure drugs, like phenobarbital, is critical to maintain seizure control in cats. Unfortunately, providing medications by mouth to cats can be difficult and cause stress to the patient and client. Missed doses of anti-seizure medications can result in seizures.

Dr. Heidi Barnes Heller is conducting a study to compare the use of oral phenobarbital to phenobarbital applied to the skin as a lotion. Appropriate amounts of phenobarbital need to be present in the body to keep a patient from having seizures. This study compares the amount of phenobarbital in the blood of cats receiving the medication by mouth compared to the same cat receiving the drug through the skin. Additionally, the study will collect information on side effects and ease of administering the medication.

Any cats with seizures may qualify for the study—if the only seizure medication they receive is phenobarbital. The study:
- Patients continue on phenobarbital by mouth for three months then switch to the phenobarbital skin lotion for three months.
- Patients receive free neurology examinations, blood tests and phenobarbital during enrollment in the study.
- Clients receive a gift card, at completion of the study, as a thank you gift for participating.

For more information, visit uwveterinarycare.wisc.edu/clinical-studies/neurology/

Clinical Studies
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a clinical study?
Clinical studies involve researching new medications, treatments, tests or devices to determine if they improve patients’ health and well-being. Clinical studies may be called clinical trials or clinical research.

2. How can my pet participate?
All studies have specific criteria regarding species of animal, condition to be treated, current medications, etc. Information on the requirements for each study are included on our website. Check back often for new studies to open. Clinical studies are always voluntary. No animals are entered into a study without the full understanding and permission of the client.

3. What are the benefits or risks?
Patients participating in a study may receive treatments not available to the general population. A pet may or may not benefit from this, however, all studies advance scientific knowledge. New drugs and protocols may have side effects and studies may require more frequent visits to the UW Veterinary Care for recheck exams and laboratory tests. All studies are reviewed and require approval by the School of Veterinary Medicine’s Animal Care and Use Committee to assure minimal risk to the patient.

4. What does it cost?
The cost of participation varies with the individual study. Many studies are funded by grants that cover part or all of the treatment costs. All fees are discussed prior to a patient entering a study.