A Beautiful Coat Starts with Healthy Skin

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Because the skin is on the outside of the body, it is easily exposed to outside elements and susceptible to injury and disease. It is also very visible, so a veterinarian can readily detect problems during an examination.

Skin is made up of layers

The skin is made up of layers of cells, lubricating (sebaceous) glands, blood vessels, nerve endings, and hair follicles, which produce hairs. The skin cells form layers, namely the tough outer covering called the "epidermis" and the deeper layer called the "dermis."

The epidermis is composed of older cells that form a tough protective outer barrier. As the outer cells erode, other cells mature and move up to replace them. The epidermis varies in thickness. The more exposed areas, such as the head and back, are thicker than areas such as the belly and under the forearms.

Haircoat is part of the skin

The deeper layer of skin, called the "dermis" contains hair follicles, blood vessels, nerves, and sebaceous glands. Haircoat is different for every breed. Factors such as day length, hormones, average outdoor temperature, and nutrition may influence coat development.

The haircoat functions as insulation and protection. Each hair grows from a simple opening within the skin called a "hair follicle." A kitten is born with all of the hair follicles it will ever possess. Any future differences or changes of the haircoat will be due to changes within the follicle. Each hair shaft produced by a hair follicle will eventually die and is removed (shed) and replaced by a new hair shaft produced by that hair follicle. Breeds and individuals within every breed will shed and regrow hair at varying rates.

How skin can be damaged

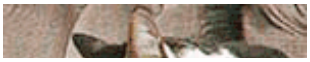
Veterinarians see cats for skin disorders more often than for any other problem. Skin can be damaged in a variety of ways, including bite wounds from cat fights, abrasions, tearing, infections, and allergies. When skin is damaged, a process called inflammation takes place. Inflammation is a condition in which tissue reacts to injury and undergoes changes during the healing process. When skin is inflamed, it may be red, hot, swollen, or painful. Inflammation can be caused by:

- Primary infection (with bacteria or fungi)
- External parasites (such as fleas or mites)
- Allergic reaction
- Secondary infection
- Immune diseases

Taking care of the skin

Cats care for their own skin by self-grooming. A cat's rough tongue does several good things for their skin health:

- Distributes natural oils
- Sloughs off dead skin and debris



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- Removes surface parasites

Also, a cat will roll or rub up against things to

- Scent mark her environment
- Massage her skin and remove dirt

What we can do

A cat cannot always do enough to take care of her own skin, so we have to do what we can to help. Some actions we can take to help our cats take care of their skin include:

- Bathing may help your cat by washing away excess dead skin. Always use a product made specifically for cats.
- Brushing can help distribute skin oils, help loosen dead skin, remove excess hair, and keep your cat's haircoat looking good.
- Flea control is imperative for preventing problems associated with fleas and other external parasites. We recommend monthly topical flea preventives, such as Bio Spot® ACTIVE CARE SPOT ON® for Cats.
- Clipping nails will prevent scratches that could damage the skin and perhaps become infected. See our easy-to-use nail trimmers.

Taking care of YOUR cat's skin in the short term may save you money and hassle in the long term. Your cat will also appreciate the attention you give when you're helping her take care of her skin.

Beautiful haircoats and healthy skin are possible with...

Vitacaps®

Dual Sided Cat Brush

Drs. Foster & Smith Adult Dry Cat Food Chicken & Brown Rice

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