

## CARING FOR THE WESTIE FEET

As a beautician and instructor of cosmetology (many years ago) we were taught to spot any irregularities on the skin, face, scalp (hair shaft, root and follicles) and nails (coloration & thickness). Using that education with grooming westies, I'd like to share with you what has worked for me in clearing up foot fungus.

Description: reddish, brownish colored hair between the pads of the toes, can be matted and discolored on the top part of the foot also. It has an odor of corn chips. The skin, especially in-between the toes, can be red and swollen.

The nails can have a build-up of tarter like substance on it, and the nail bed may be inflamed. The nails may be too long also.

If you see one or more of the above problems, the immune system of the westie is being taxed. If not treated, it will then progress into a skin problem with the westies loosing all the undercoat (skin mites and mange can occur). Lastly, it then proceeds into the ears.

Most Vets call this an allergy, or will tell you your dog is allergic to grass because the dog's feet get wet from the grass in the early morning and the hair stays wet. Then this in turn feeds the fungus all day. Some vets then put your westie on his or her "SPECIAL" food or "SPECIAL SHAMPOO" and your westie is given steroids! This can be very costly! Sadly, the *problem* is not taken care of.

The first step is to remove all discolored hair. **If it means cutting the foot like a poodles, please do it. It is hair and it will grow back even better.**

Examine the foot, pads and nails.

If the pads and inner part of the foot are red and swollen, you may need an antibiotic and I use Cephalexin\* as last resort. . . Cleaning the foot now is easier, with the hair gone.

Over the years I have used Listerine in four little yogurt cups. Never use the same liquid on a different foot. Fungus is contagious; you need to treat it like athletes foot. There is a good chance many westies pick this up at the groomers. This is because they are not required by the Health Department or state boards to **clean** and **sterilize** their blades, clippers, combs and brushes, as the Beauty shops are.

I sometimes use Hydrogen Peroxide Solution 3 %. I use a toothbrush to brush between the pads and around each nail. Look and see if they are inflamed, long or have tarter around/on them. The toothbrush will also clean the tarter off the nail near the nail bed. The Cephalexin\* will also help the inflamed nail bed, once it is clean and dry.

If the westie has long nails this could have started the problem also. Walking on long nails pushes the nail, back into the nail bed, causing inflammation.

My suggestion here is to ask the vet for a nail cutback. This cauterizes the nail.

A nail cutback is needed if the westie will not allow you to work on the feet. The guillotine nail cutter...in my opinion needs to be outlawed! There are so many vets, pet owners, breeders that hurt dogs with this tool. I don't blame any dog for fighting & biting in trying to stay away from the **pain**. Using a dermal tool is easy and painless.

Once you do a nail cut-back, the nail needs trimmed on a regular basis. The nail vein, after a cut-back is short (the way it is supposed to be) and when you do not keep the shell trimmed, it then grows long...with no vein in the center. **The weight of the dog can split**

**the nail and infection can kill the dog in a short time. So, if you were not going to keep the nails trimmed on a regular basis, I would not get a nail cut-back.**

Over time you can work the nail vain back by using the dremal to the vain often.

Now, that the hair is gone, the foot is clean and the nails are short, keeping them dry until the completely healed, can be hard. I do use Gold Bond anti-fungal powder on the westies foot every time they are brushed.

Purchasing 12 X12 cement blocks or having a gravel or river rock area for them to urinate in the early morning is the optimal potty area. **It could be an x-pen just for the early morning potty right outside the back door.** In neighborhoods that do not allow fencing, short shrubs can camouflage this x-pen. My pet owners that live on golf courses use this type of safe, dry potty area.

My advice comes to you with over 30 years experience in breeding westies. I hope you find the above tools and information valuable in assisting you when taking care of your westies feet. If you have questions please email me at [westies@kenlakes.com](mailto:westies@kenlakes.com) and we will post the questions with answers in the next newsletter.

**Rose Carpenter**

#### **\*About Cephalexin**

Cephalexin is a broad spectrum antibiotic used to treat bacterial infections of the skin, urinary tract, respiratory tract, bones and joints.

#### **Features/Use/Recommendation**

This medication should not be used in animals allergic to penicillin or cephalosporins. Use with caution in pregnant and nursing animals. Use with caution in animals when given with probenecid or aminoglycosides such as neomycin and gentamicin. Use with caution when given with other drugs that may affect the kidneys. Always tell your veterinarian and pharmacist what other medications your pet is taking.

#### **Side Effects**

The side effects when using cephalosporins, which may include loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhea, are rare. Allergic reactions such as itching, rash and difficulty breathing may occur. Side effects in dogs may also include drooling, rapid breathing and excitability. Fever and vomiting are additional side effects that may occur in cats.