

How to protect your pet's skin from sun damage
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Several skin diseases in dogs and cats are caused, in part, by excessive sun exposure. Some of these diseases include: discoid lupus erythematosus, actinic keratosis, hemangioma, hemangiosarcoma and squamous cell carcinoma.

Cats and dogs with short, white hair are at increased risk of sustaining sun damage to the skin. In cats, the nose, eyelids and ear tips are most sensitive to excessive sun exposure. In dogs, the nose and abdominal skin are most sensitive.

In addition to coat characteristics, there are some cats and dogs that are genetically more likely to develop sun damaged skin than others.

The most important thing to do to protect your pet from sun damage is to limit prolonged sun exposure – especially from 10AM to 4PM. Owners should discourage their cats and dogs from activities such as prolonged sun bathing in the yard or spending hours in a boat at the lake. Glass windows block some, but not all, ultraviolet (UV) rays. Lying in front of the window in the sun is only problematic for pets with the most sensitive skin.

Pets that can't avoid excessive sun exposure or pets that have particularly sensitive skin may need to wear sun protective clothing. Pets wearing sun protective clothing will get hot more quickly than normal, so they need to be monitored closely for signs of heat exhaustion.

Additionally, pets will benefit from application of sunscreen to area of the skin where there is little or no hair. Pet-specific sunscreen products are available. Pets can also use sunscreen designed for babies. Owners must be certain to avoid sunscreen products that contain zinc oxide or para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA), as these ingredients are toxic to animals.

Signs of sun-damaged skin include: redness, scaling, swelling, crusting and hair loss. If these signs are observed, the pet should be brought out of the sun, cooled off and brought to the veterinarian for evaluation.