Grass Seeds, You, and Your Furry Friend

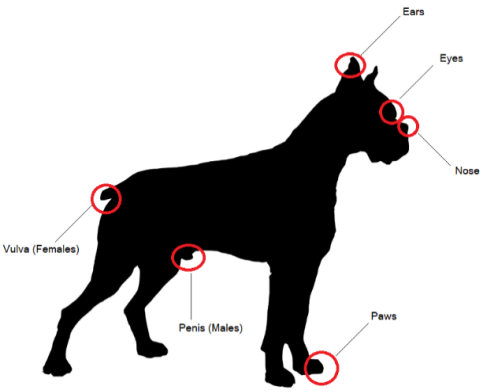
Even with the cold weather approaching, grass seeds continue to become a nuisance to our furry friends.

All cats and dogs are at risk, especially when they are walking through long grass. Grass seeds have awns, which are bristle-like fibres allowing them to attach to the skin of the dog or cat. They can be so sharp that they can prick and enter the skin, leading to swelling and irritation. In rarer occasions, they can burrow and travel, and can even reach the animal's internal organs.

1Grass seeds extracted in the deeper region of the ear on a dog

How do I know if my pet has grass seed wounds?

Signs are dependent on the location of the grass seed wound and how long the grass seed has been lodged in for. Common places are the ears, skin, and paws where it can create a bacterial infection (pus) but they can also be found on the eyes, nose and reproductive areas. Grass seeds may also be consumed and can cause irritation to the gums, tongue and throat, which can cause coughing/gagging.



Skin: Swelling, pet licking at area affected, redness, bleeding/pus
Eyes: Swollen red eyes, eye rubbing, weepy eyes, ulceration, difficulty seeing
Ears: Red and painful, head shaking, ear scratching, loss of balance, holding head to one side,
Nose: Sneezing, discharge from nostril, difficulty breathing
Paws: Excessive licking, limping, red and swollen on or in between toes
Genitalia: Redness and swelling, licking, pain when urinating

How are grass seed wounds treated and prevented?

Grass seeds should be found immediately after lodging before they cause further injury. Removal of the grass seeds can be difficult as they can be small, requiring tweezers to ensure all of the seed is removed. If not, further infection and irritation can occur. The pet must be given a full physical exam by a veterinarian to find all grass seed wounds on the animal. The dog or cat may also experience discomfort and may require a mild sedative to make them more comfortable in the removal process. If the seed and awn are buried deeply, surgical intervention may be required. Grass seed wounds need to be thoroughly explored and flushed to ensure that all of the plant particles are removed from the wound. A course of antibiotics and pain relief may be indicated.

Pets who are mostly outside, especially field/working dogs are at most risk, but that doesn't mean that dogs that live in the suburbs are not susceptible! Longer grass should be avoided and the pet should be checked thoroughly after a walk, simply by running your hands through their fur and checking for areas where they may be irritated. Pets should be well groomed if possible – fur kept short especially around the feet/toes for longer haired animals reduces the chance of grass seeds lodging.

If you have any questions regarding grass seed or think a grass seed may be lodged in your pet, please give us a call to schedule an appointment.

Dr Alex

Vet HQ Double Bay