The interpretation of “abnormal” relies on an understanding of what falls outside of normal. Abnormal pruritus in dogs has been defined as frequent itching, typically focused in 1 spot, that interrupts eating or playing or keeps the owner awake. Abnormal GI signs have been associated with dermatopathies and enteropathies in previous studies. In this study, 314 adult dogs from several countries were examined by veterinarians and determined to be otherwise healthy and, specifically, free of skin and GI diseases. Participating veterinarians obtained pruritus visual analog scale (PVAS) scores and fecal consistency scores (FCS) from dog owners; owners were then asked to complete a 52-question online survey. The mean PVAS was 0.56, with 275 (87.6%) dogs having “apparently normal” scores of ≤1.9. Higher PVAS scores were correlated with licking and/or chewing of paws, facial and/or muzzle rubbing, head shaking, and sneezing. Scooting was positively correlated with sneezing and/or chewing of paws, and may indicate a problem beyond anal sac disease.

Study dogs had a mean of 2.2 bowel movements (BMs) per day. GI signs were positively correlated with activity; active dogs had more BMs. Ingestion of treats was significantly associated with increased flatulence. Paw licking and/or chewing, head shaking, sneezing, number of BMs/day, coprophagia, flatulence, belching, and borborygmi were positively correlated with the number of walks per day. Grass-eating was observed in 77.7% of 309 dogs. This study helped the authors develop a standard method for asking relevant questions regarding pruritus and establish a baseline of normal frequency of GI signs and pruritic behaviors.

**Commentary**

When working up a dog for allergies, it is common to ask questions about the dog’s GI health to look for clues suggesting that the pruritus is caused by an adverse food reaction. For example, an increased frequency of BM or flatulence suggests a possible GI component. Based on the findings in this study, a more important question would be to ask about the dog’s activity level and not only what the owner is feeding the dog but everything it eats (eg, treats). If flatulence is a concern and the dog eats treats, stop the treats before having the owner start a food trial so that the true target clinical sign can be monitored. Also, have owners keep an activity log and note BM and consistency before starting a food trial so that an accurate assessment can be made.

—Karen A. Moriello, DVM, DACVD

**Source**


This study helped the authors develop a standard method for asking relevant questions regarding pruritus and establish a baseline of normal frequency of GI signs and pruritic behaviors.