

Sadie's Yeast Infection: How we overcame Malassezia Pachydermatitis

by Katy Widger

First Symptoms:

When Sadie first came to us in early November 2007, we noticed that she was "itchy" but attributed it to her move from humid Minnesota to very dry New Mexico. I bathed her with "dry skin" shampoo and conditioner, but the itching continued.

By December 21, I noticed that the fringes of her ear leathers were encrusted with yellowish, flake-like scabs that came off when I scratched them, but did not bleed like a true scab covering a wound. She was, by this time, scratching her ear leathers and ear canals furiously. She was also biting her toenails and licking her feet, symptoms I recognized as auto-immune reactions which can be caused by recent rabies vaccination, and she had one in October. I started her on an immune-boosting supplement called Transfer Factor.

I began looking for a cause online, and found a condition called vasculitis which seemed to fit the symptoms and also commonly follows rabies vaccination.

I won't define it here, but it seemed a likely candidate and requires veterinary attention, so I made an appointment with the vet, for Jan.8, first opportunity after her holiday vacation.

I bathed her on Dec. 22, paying close attention to her ear leathers, but was careful to keep water out of her ear canals. This did not help. Several days later, her ears were much worse. By the time I got her to the vet, her little ears were inflamed, the skin thickened and a deep burgundy red. They were encrusted with beige-golden colored flakes, especially around the fringes of her ear leathers and in the little pocket flaps on the outside edges of her ears. She was scratching so furiously that she had created secondary injury and was clearly miserable.

Holistic vet treated her with acupressure, homeopathics for vaccine and anesthesia remedy and gave me Chinese herbs to begin cleansing her liver and gallbladder. I left with dietary instructions which included continuing the raw protein diet (Primal raw meatloaf, green tripe, fermented veggies, raw goat milk kefir and raw goat milk cheese) she was already eating. No carbs or sugars allowed. (I had been feeding her eggs, but had discontinued them earlier, as a possible allergen.)

She gave me very little advice concerning treatment of her ears, and in fact, what she did tell me to do didn't help at all, so I embarked on my own treatment. (She advised gently wiping her ears off with a mild solution of baking soda and water, but it was obviously painful to Sadie, so I only did it once.) Her initial treatment was good for holistic care, but I would have certainly appreciated better advice and treatment of the ear infection, which was, by then, a primary concern.

Conferring with Julie Timbers and Debby Rothman, I finally concluded that she was suffering from the overgrowth of the yeast Malassezia Pachydermatitis. The vet probably knew this, but didn't bother to tell me about it. She did confirm that Sadie was definitely not suffering from any type of mange mite infestation.

How Did She Get It?

There is a lot of information available online about this type of yeast infection in dogs. Google it. Dogs have it present in their bodies, the same as we all have Candida albicans present in our bodies. Like us, when their immune systems are stressed or compromised, it offers the opportunity for this particular yeast to have its day. Looking back at Sadie's life as a show dog, the life style she lived, the places she traveled, vaccinations and drugs she received towards this end, all were stressors that contributed to this problem. Last summer, she had a litter of six puppies and soon after they were weaned, received another course of drugs for her itching problem. Soon after, she was spayed which caused an immediate hormone imbalance, received anesthesia, antibiotics and another, totally unnecessary, rabies vaccine (a major challenge to her immune system). Then, she was transported soon after to Denver and on to New Mexico for a complete change in lifestyle and diet and caretakers. All this certainly caused major stress in a very short period of time in a young dog's life, no matter that every human involved loved and cared about her.

How Was It Successfully Treated?

Once I knew what it was, I knew where to start. She was already on an "anti-yeast" diet - no grain carbs or sugars or cooked foods.

The first and best thing I did for her, before I even knew what we were dealing with, was to start her on a course of immune-boosting supplement called "Transfer Factor". It's amazing stuff and utilized for show animals and sick animals, and humans, too. It contains every known immune-boosting substance, including the "transfer factor" that "transfers" cellular immunity. Read about it online at Shirley's Wellness Cafe.com and order it at 4Life.com.

The vet recommended feeding her yogurt, for the pro-biotics like acidophilus that it contains. I have something better at my disposal. We make our own authentic raw goat's milk kefir, which is far superior to yogurt in every way. Easily digestible, the different types of probiotics contained in kefir far outnumber those in commercial yogurt. And, unlike acidophilus and other bacteria in yogurt, which exits your body with every bowel movement, the bacteria in kefir actually colonize your gut and soon over-populate the "bad" bacteria and fungal matter (the enemy yeast we are trying to eradicate).

She receives about 1/8th teaspoon of Carlson cod liver oil every day, for the Omega 3's and the highly available natural A and D. Also, 1/4 tsp. fish oil and flax oil, for the Omega 3's and 6's, necessary for skin health and immune protection, etc. (She only weighs 11 lbs.)

I also feed her about a 1/2 tsp. of virgin coconut oil every day, which has amazing anti-fungal properties in the gut.

In addition, she receives fermented beets and beet greens and kale, which were grown in our organic garden this summer and are now fermented with the whey from our goat cheese. This produces a product that closely resembles the contents of a prey animal's stomach, complete with enzymes from the fresh veggies and whey, and natural lactic acid bacteria, some of the "good guys". Beets and greens for now, because they cleanse and strengthen the liver and gall bladder, which is the body's first line of defense against allergies as the immune system is strengthened. Any and all vegetables can be fermented, and the dogs get a rotating variety of organic veggies regularly.

(I explained how to ferment veggies for dogs using purchased yogurt whey on the Apso Blog).

Instead of using a drug to treat the immediate infection in her ears, I choose a product called Zymox Otic, which is an OTC enzymatic product in glycerin that "eats" the infection, be it viral, bacterial or yeast, and has no side effects. (I got it from 1800PetMeds.com). It comes in two varieties, with and without hydrocortisone, to suppress the itching. I chose the one without the hydrocortisone because I didn't want to suppress her itchiness, I wanted to know when and if the stuff was working and I would only know that if she quit scratching herself. Which, soon enough, she did. She's been on the once-daily Zymox treatment for ten days now, and her little ears, formerly burgundy red, inflamed, and encrusted with the golden yellow yeasty flakes, are now only slightly redder than Zeke's healthy pink ears. The inflammation is almost gone, her ears are once again pliable and the yeast has retreated to a thin line around the edges of her leathers and the edges of those little pockets on the sides of her ears. This past 24 hours she has not scratched once, and this morning, ten days into the daily treatment with the Zymox and 30 days since her ears were totally encrusted, I can find no fresh yeast on her ears at all.

Prior to the arrival by mail of the Zymox, I treated her ears with an herbal remedy consisting of garlic and mullein-infused olive oil with tea tree oil and lavender essential oils added. I used this for 3-4 days, and noticed an immediate clearing of the yeast. But because I learned that the yeast "feeds" on lipids, and I wanted to give the Zymox a fair trial, I discontinued my "home remedy" and started the enzymatic product. I also treated her poor little damaged ear leathers with my own Critter Balm, which contains olive-oil infused with calendula and comfrey with essential oil of tea tree and lavender, also. It healed up all the secondary scarring on her ears quickly and seemed to diminish the yeast considerably, too. But once healed from the secondary damage, I began rubbing the enzymatic Zymox on her ear leathers, with excellent results, as well, and discontinued the home remedy. Both tea tree and lavender oils have very good anti-fungal properties, and I wouldn't hesitate to use them again. Knowing that this particular yeast feeds on skin surface lipids, however, I would mix it with some glycerin instead of olive oil.

I also soaked her itchy feet and toenails in cider vinegar/water, which gave instant relief. Her nipples also became encrusted with the yeast at one point, and the application of the home remedy mentioned above, eliminated the yeast and softened her little nibs once again.

I'm sorry I didn't take pictures of her poor little ears at their worst, but I hope the description given will help in making an accurate diagnosis. As the yeast dies, it disintegrates and turns a dark reddish brown color and I was able to comb it out of her ears each evening before treating her with the Zymox. The yeast persisted in a very definable line around the perimeters of her ear leathers and on the edges of the ear flaps after it was eliminated from the inside areas of her ears.

The discharge from her ear canals was dark initially, the same color as the dried, dead yeast that I combed from her ears.

The following pictures are of her ears today, 10 days into treatment with Zymox and 24 hours since she has scratched with no real visible yeast showing. You can still see the areas where the yeast was growing, the "line of demarcation". And the redness persists,

although moving towards a healthier pink. The inflammation is gone and the ears are soft and pliable once again.

Compare the photos of Sadie's ears with the beautiful, clean, pink healthy ears belonging to Zeke. The Vet said, on a 1-10 scale, Zeke being a "1", Sadie, at her worst, was a 9 or 10. I'd say she's now a 3 or 4, as the photos show. We'll continue on this program until she has #1 ears again and then continue preventative measures forever. I have purchased extra bottles of Zymox and a drying ear cleaner to use before and after every bath.

The ultimate cure is in an immune-boosting diet free from allergens and rich with enzymes and probiotics, and eliminating stress as much as possible from our dog's lives.

I've learned a lot from this experience and hope to keep her free from future occurrences, but I'll sure know what to do sooner, if it happens again.



Zeke's clean, healthy ear, for comparison. Vet said he was a "1" on a scale of 1 - 10. (And this is three weeks without a bath!)



Sadie's ear canal. Still shows the dark, dead yeast draining from her ear in the Zymox glycerin solution. You can see the dark areas on her leather, above, where the yeast was actively growing.



Sadie's whole ear. You can see some dark spots on the ear leather where the yeast was growing. There is a dark line also around the perimeter of her ear leather where the yeast continued to grow. The ears are now far less "burgundy" colored than they were even just a few days prior.



This shows Sadie's ear flaps. You can still see the tiny flakes of yeast around the edges of the pocket, extending out into the hair. At one time, it was entirely filled with the crusty yeast flakes.