

Dippity Pig

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"Dippity Pig" is the unfortunate name that has been given to a commonly occurring skin condition in pet potbellied pigs. The first thing noted by many pet owners are bloody, oozing sores on the pig's back, neck or rump, immediately over the spinal column. This skin condition appears to be accompanied by such extreme pain that the pig will scream and drop it's hind end, dragging it's back legs as if paralyzed before standing, taking a few steps and falling again. Pet owners witnessing this behavior for the first time usually panic, believing that their pet pig has been shot, burned, hit by a car or some other traumatic event. Usually a thorough history and physical exam by the veterinarian will reveal a likely diagnosis of "dippity pig".

However, making a diagnosis of "dippity pig" can be confusing on occasion. I have seen pigs with severe skin lesions on their back that showed absolutely no sign of pain. I have also seen pigs "dipping" (acting painful in their back) that had no skin lesions whatsoever. This is just a part of the mystery of "dippity pig".

The actual cause of "dippity pig" is also unknown. When this syndrome first appeared, many of these pigs had spinal radiographs, skin biopsies and cultures performed before a diagnosis of "moist dermatitis of unknown cause" was made. Some of the possible causes that have been hypothesized are: allergies (the condition does appear to be seasonal) photosensitization, skin fold pyoderma and sunburn.

Treatment of cases of "dippity pig" should first and foremost be aimed at controlling the pig's pain and hopefully relieving it's "terror". This can be done with anti-inflammatories, such as aspirin or cortisone, or pain killers such as butorphanol. In my experience, aspirin is usually adequate. More severe cases might need the more "potent" medications, cortisone or butorphanol. Cortisone and butorphanol will usually require a visit to the veterinarian and Murphy's Law of Veterinary Medicine requires that most cases of "dippity pig" occur at night or on weekends or holidays. This is probably why aspirin is the most often used pain killer for "dippity pig"; because most pet owners have this in their home already. The clinical course of "dippity pig" appears to be very short, with most pigs recovering within 24 hours, regardless of treatment.

Many cases of "dippity pig" have been treated with antihistamines such as diphenhydramine (plain Benadryl) and antibiotics. Since the cause is still unknown, and since so many pigs recover with no treatment, it is impossible at this time to determine if those treatments are helpful. It is unlikely that they are harmful. The standard dose of diphenhydramine for animals is one mg. Per pound. This means that a 25 pound pig can be given one Benadryl capsule (it contains 25 mg. of diphenhydramine). When treating a hundred pound pig, I usually decrease the dose a little

because of the sedating effects of antihistamines, so I suggest three capsules per 100 pound pig. Aspirin can be given to a pig at a dose of 5 mg. per pound (equivalent to 1 1/2 regular aspirin per 100 pound pig). A word of caution about aspirin: pigs are susceptible to the irritating affect of aspirin on the stomach and I recommend that aspirin always be given to a pig with food! Aspirin should only be given at twelve hour intervals and should not be given for more than 24 - 48 hours unless under a veterinarians supervision. If vomiting or diarrhea develop, aspirin should be immediately discontinued. Do not give pigs any product containing acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen. The use of these products in the potbellied pig have not been documented to be safe at this time.

"Dippity pig" is a fascinating condition, in part, because it appears to be so unique to the potbellied pig. More research should be done, but lack of funding for research concerning potbellied pigs currently limits us. The veterinary profession and related industries seem to believe that there are not enough potbellied pigs kept as pets to justify increasing our knowledge of them. The only way to change this perception is for pig owners to continually speak up and speak out about the role that potbellied pigs can play as pets and the importance of proper veterinary care to their health and longevity.

Note: See attached pictures of Dippity Pig both on black and on white pigs.

