

TOENAILS FALLING OFF

PEMPHIGUS AKA

SYMMETRICAL LUPOID ONCHODYSTROPHY



LUCA PENNI, DIANA AS HUNTRESS, (C.1550)

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By far, in greyhounds, the most common reason for multiple nail loss from multiple feet is pemphigus-aka symmetrical lupoid onchodystrophy (SLO). In pemphigus/SLO, the nails separate at the base and come off. You may see normal looking nails and more blood upon losing a nail in newer cases and less blood and "funky nails" in more chronic cases. The nails that regrow are stumpy, crumbly, and misshapen.



Photos courtesy Carol Macherey, DVM

Pemphigus/SLO as it occurs in the greyhound involves the nails only, there are no other systemic signs - though there may certainly be a poor appetite and/or lethargy associated with the chronic pain. All of the greyhound specific texts and articles I've ever read refer to this autoimmune condition as "pemphigus." These sources include Care of the Racing Greyhound (Blythe, Gannon, Craig), Canine Sports Medicine & Surgery (Bloomberg, Dee, Taylor), and The Racing Greyhound - Management, Medicine & Surgery (Herron, Gannon). On the other hand, a biopsy submitted to any commercial lab will be given the diagnosis of "SLO". Properly, as one of the IDEXX pathologists explained it to me, SLO involves nails and so is the correct histopathological diagnosis, whereas pemphigus involves footpads and interdigital skin. So "pemphigus" vs. "SLO" is unimportant and a matter of semantics; we are talking about the

same clinical syndrome. While toenail pemphigus/SLO is an oddball diagnosis in other breeds, it should go straight to the top of the list in greyhounds experiencing multiple nail loss.

While it is, of course, possible to get secondary infections in unhealthy pemphigus nails, you cannot resolve the problem without treating the underlying autoimmune disorder. Too many people spend too much time and money treating pemphigus as a "fungal" (the #1 misdiagnosis) or "bacterial" infection with foot soaks, topicals, and expensive oral medications. Common sense will tell you that culturing a nail as a means of diagnosis is quite likely to yield any number of cooties as greyhounds use their nails to walk across the (unsterile) ground.

Unfortunately, the only way to definitively diagnose pemphigus/SLO is by amputating the whole P3 (end toe bone, including nail, just as you declaw a cat). A pathologist can make the diagnosis only by observing the skin/nail junction. The appearance/course of pemphigus in greyhounds is so classic that I feel it's a real waste of time/money, not to mention unnecessary pain and disfigurement for the poor greyhound, to go through this in the name of proving a diagnosis.

At Arizona Adopt A Greyhound, when we see one of these, the adopter gets a bottle of 4 mg chlorpheniramine tablets and a bottle of 5 mg prednisone tablets for treatment as outlined in Care of the Racing Greyhound. I do alter the dose at the end so that the dog winds up on prednisone every other day, which is healthier on the body.

5 mg pred and 2 mg chlorpheniramine every 8 hours for 5 days, then
5 mg pred and 2 mg chlorpheniramine every 12 hours for 10 days, then
2.5 mg pred and 2 mg chlorpheniramine every 8 hours for 10 days, then
2.5 mg pred and 2 mg chlorpheniramine every 12 hours for 10 days, then
10 mg pred every other day and 2 mg chlorpheniramine every 12 hours long term

Once healthy nails have regrown, it may be possible to wean the dog off of prednisone entirely. Though it takes 4-5 months for new nails to regrow, often there is a dramatic improvement in comfort within the first few weeks of treatment. My experience has been that the sooner you get on top of these, the better the chance for regrowth of normal nails. Chronic untreated pemphigus greyhounds will always have crumbly stumpy nails, but at least treatment even at that point will stop them from continuing to lose nails. It is also worth checking thyroid levels and supplementing greyhounds that are unequivocally low. Many if not most greyhounds have marginally low thyroid levels normally - I certainly don't advocate putting all of these on Soloxine.