

## AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES

### WHAT ARE THEY?

Autoimmune diseases are noncontagious diseases that affect the immune system of the animal. Although many possible causes have been identified, to date is not known with certainty the mechanism that triggers these diseases. The skin is one of the target organs, and when the animal is affected, its immune system behaves toward it as if faced with a foreign body and attacks it.

### WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

In the course of Pemphigus foliaceus, one of the most common autoimmune diseases in dogs and cats, the lesions that can be observed are pustules and crusts preferentially located on the face inside of the ear pinnae, on the nose and on the footpads.

In the course of discoid Lupus erythematosus or rarer diseases such as bullous pemphigoid are observable vesicles, erosions and ulcers that may be localized on the nose, at the junctions between skin and mucous membranes (lips, eyelids, anus) but may also affect other parts of the body as the groin.

### DIAGNOSIS

Autoimmune diseases are diagnosed by a careful clinical examination that excludes other infectious or environmental diseases and is confirmed by performing a skin biopsy. The biopsy consists of a taking of a small of fragment of skin performed if possible under local anesthesia, but for some particular sites requires 'general anesthesia of the animal.

### HOW DO YOU TREAT AN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE?

Treating an autoimmune disease requires therapies that suppress the immune response of the subject. These therapies are called immunosuppressive therapies and employ high doses of cortisone and other immunosuppressive drugs such as azathioprine, and chlorambucil. Recently for some autoimmune diseases, oclacitinib, a drug commonly used for allergic dermatitis in dogs is an option. Animals being treated with immunosuppressive therapy should be checked regularly by the veterinarian to assess the occurrence of secondary infections and possibly be subjected to an appropriate antibiotic treatment