

# DIPPITY PIG SYNDROME by: Jenny Blaney

It's spring. I can tell because the calls about Dippity Pig are coming in. The medical term for Dippity is Erythema Multiforme. Literally translated it means: a superficial reddening of the skin, usually in patches, that takes many forms. Personally, I like "Dippity Pig" better!

## Symptoms

While Dippity can vary in character and severity from pig to pig, there are certain definite symptoms. These include, but not necessarily all at once:

A sensitivity to being touched around the back end of the pig sometimes to the point that the pig squeals when touched

A "hunkered-down" stance with the tail tucked between the back legs and clamped to the body

Weakness of and/or inability to use the back legs to the point of falling down

Pain, restlessness, distress

The above symptoms may or may not be accompanied by moist, red areas appearing over the rump region and extending halfway up the back toward the head. These moist areas sometimes turn into actual lesions that can ooze serum or blood. They usually run from side to side, not head to tail.

Lisle George, D.V.M. from the University of California at Davis, describes Dippity as:

"The clinical signs include squealing and inability to walk without falling down in the rear limbs. Affected pigs suddenly howl painfully, and fall with the rear limbs extended backward, and the back arched. They may pull themselves forward with the fore limbs while keeping the rear limbs extended behind them. The skin over the lumbar area is extremely painful, and the pig resists vigorously whenever the back is touched lightly. Severe responses can be evoked by blowing on the back. The skin thickens over twelve hours, and begins weeping. This forms an oval wet patch over the lumbar area measuring 5 by 10 cm."

The onset of symptoms of Dippity is often quite sudden. The weakness and sensitivity in the back legs can occur in a matter of hours. A perfectly normal pig can be incapacitated three hours later. Any skin eruptions or lesions can occur in a matter of minutes. Depending on the pain threshold of the pig and the severity of the case, the animal ends up anywhere from uncomfortable to screaming with pain.

## Causes

The primary cause of Dippity appears to be stress. It is not clear whether the stress is external or internal in nature, or whether it can be self-induced. External stress could include a pig show, a trip to the vet, the introduction of a new pig or owner, a violent thunderstorm or a sudden deviation in normal routine.

There also appears to be some correlation between Dippity and exposure to the sun. A friend of mine acquired ten, white, commercial pigs who were about ten weeks old. They had been in a total confinement system, therefore, had never been out in the sun. Upon their release into the

great outdoors, these white pigs all developed the “dipping” and “squealing” symptoms of Dippity, without the lesions. Was this just a case of severe sunburn or Dippity Pig?

Internal stress could mean an inappropriate diet or a change in diet, inadequate water supply, a sudden drastic change in body temperature due either to illness or climate, even the onset of a particularly hard heat cycle for the female pig. Often the triggering of a Dippity episode can be traced back to an unusual, recent event in the pig’s life.

### Treatment

There is no treatment for Dippity, nor is there any preventive medication available at this time since the exact causes have not been determined. Topical creams or sprays can encourage healing of the sores and lesions. Injectable drugs can be used to alleviate discomfort or pain. However, once Dippity occurs, no drugs will prevent it from running its course. The onset of Dippity is quite spontaneous. Duration of symptoms can be anywhere from 24-72 hours. Complete recovery is just as spontaneous and mysterious. Spring and summer seem to be the most common times of year for Dippity to occur. More often than not it is younger pigs who are affected – that is pigs under two years of age.

The most important thing you can do for your piggies if Dippity strikes, is to immediately reduce stress, both internal and external. Confine your pig in a suitable temperature for the time of year. A quiet, dark place does a lot to calm your pig. Low music helps to soothe also. Keep your pig well hydrated during the episode. Reassure and comfort your pig often, but complete rest is a must. Prevention of sunburn can be accomplished by using a sun screen on your pig. If lesions are present, liquid vitamin E or aloe vera gel are soothing and healing. Some vets prescribe topical 1% hydrocortisone cream. Consult your veterinarian as to the appropriateness of drugs to alleviate discomfort or pain.

Dippity can occur as a single, one-time event, or a pig can suffer multiple attacks. Seldom does it occur in older pigs, even though they may have been affected as younger kids. Perhaps they outgrow it. In seven years, I have never heard of any lasting ill effects from this mysterious condition.

For pigs who have had Dippity more than once, there is a check list available to help determine the causes and possibly provide preventive measure. For further information, contact Jenny Blaney.