



Does Your Dog Have Allergies?

There are numerous reasons that cause a dog to itch leading to scratching and chewing at itself. The itch may be caused because fleas are biting at him, or because his skin is irritated and/or dry. Allergens can also cause itching in dogs, quite often the itching is caused by a combination of dry skin, fleas, allergens and irritation. In some cases, the symptoms involve the respiratory system, with coughing, sneezing, and/or wheezing, as well as a discharge from eyes or nose.

How to Determine If Your Dog Has Dry Skin

The main factors that contribute to dry skin in dogs:

1. Nutrient deficiency in diet
2. Over or under bathing (or using the wrong shampoos)
3. Under-grooming
4. Dry climate or forced air heating
5. Neutering/Spaying
6. Other potential causes

If you answered yes to two or more, then chances are your dog's itching is due to dry skin.

[Dry Skin Solutions](#)

Nutrient Deficiency: Dogs need fatty acids in their diet for optimal skin and coat health, especially omega-3 typically found in fish oil. A lack of omega-3 fatty acids is an extremely common cause for dry, flaky skin. Simply adding fish oil (fatty acids) to your dog's diet can help combat dry skin.

[Over Bathing](#)

Regular bathing with a good quality shampoo is critical to the health of your dog's skin and coat. How often depends on the condition of its skin. Dogs with dry skin should be bathed once a month. This allows for the removal of dead skin and coat. The best shampoo to use on a dog with dry skin is a natural one containing Colloidal Oatmeal. Even better, follow-up with a Colloidal Cream Rinse. Both these treatments are available in [our professional grooming department](#).

[Under Bathing](#)

If you don't [brush your dog](#) on a regular basis the dead skin starts to mix with the undercoat and tons of dead flakes will buildup on the surface of the skin. You'll see this if you part your dog's fur.

Long coated dogs, dogs with thick coats, and double-coated dogs are all likely to accumulate a ton of dead flakes under all that hair if they are not groomed regularly. Daily is best, but at least three or four times a week. Short-haired dogs are less prone to this as they don't have that thick undercoat for skin to get trapped in.

[Dry Climate and Forced Air Heating](#)

The dry air we experience here in New Mexico often results in our dogs having dry skin. Add to that fact that during the cold winter months, most of our dogs spend their time indoors with forced air heating or other heat sources. Adding a humidifier to your home can help.

[Spaying and Neutering](#)

Dogs that are spayed or neutered are at higher risk from suffering skin and coat problems. This is caused by the fact that the removal of the sex hormones changes the natural balance of hormones that also regulate oil production in the skin/coat.

[When It's More Than Just Dry Skin](#)

If, after treating your dog for fleas and dry skin, your pet is still itching, scratching or chewing, it's time to look at more serious causes. Each of these symptoms and their causes require the advice and treatment by your veterinarian.

Types of Allergies That Affect Pets

Environmental allergens that are inhaled or come in to contact with the skin can cause allergies known as atopy. Common sources are pollens, molds, and dust mites. Allergies that result from flea-bites are referred to as flea allergy dermatitis. Certain allergies occur from items your pet ingests, and are typically called food allergies. Then there are contact allergies that are caused by something your pet comes in direct contact with, such as carpet fibers, plastics, and other things. Contact allergies are less common than atopy and flea allergy dermatitis in pets.

Atopy

Atopy is the most common form of allergy in dogs and cats. Atopy is often seasonal. If a pet is allergic to ragweed, symptoms occur in the fall. Pets who are allergic to spring tree pollen will show signs in April and May. If a pet is allergic to dust mites, the symptoms may be most dramatic in the winter, when more time is spent inside. Signs of atopy include:

- Chewing at the feet
- Constant licking of the flank (side) and groin area
- Rubbing of the face
- Inflamed ears or recurrent ear infections
- Recurrent hot spots in dogs and pinpoint facial scabbing in cats



Figure 1- Courtesy Drs. Foster & Smith

Contact Dermatitis

Less common allergies include contact dermatitis, which include allergies to carpets, cleaners, or plastic. These allergies may cause:

- Red itchy bumps or blisters on sparsely-haired areas of the skin and those exposed to the allergen such as the belly, feet, or muzzle
- Intense scratching
- Hair loss (in chronic conditions)

Food Allergies

Food allergies account for about 10-15% of all allergies in dogs and cats. Food allergies may show up concurrently with allergies to pollen, dust, etc. Symptoms include:

- Itching, especially face, feet, trunk, limbs and anal area
- Ear problems, often yeast-related
- Skin infections that respond to antibiotics, but then recur as soon as the antibiotic therapy ceases

Occasionally, dogs with true food allergies may have increased bowel movements and soft stool. Food allergies should not be confused with food intolerances, which are not true allergies, and

If you suspect your pet has allergies, visit your veterinarian. The type of allergy and severity of the symptoms will determine how your veterinarian decides to treat them.



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