

7 Holistic Tips for Pet Allergies

By Dr. Karen Becker

Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker offering you seven holistic tips for pets with allergies. Humans who suffer from seasonal allergies usually have symptoms involving the respiratory tract like sniffing, sneezing, coughing, and sometimes difficulty breathing. When a dog or cat has a seasonal allergic response, symptoms are incredibly diverse, but most often show up as a condition called allergic dermatitis, which is irritation or inflammation of the skin.

A pet with allergies is usually incredibly itchy. He'll scratch excessively. He might bite or chew at a certain part of his body and is generally irritated. His skin can be irritated literally from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail. He may rub his body against furniture on the carpet to help relieve his miserable itch.

As the itching and scratching gets progressively worse, most of the times the skin becomes very inflamed and can become secondarily infected. There might be areas of hair loss, there could be open sores or sores that have scabbed over, and he might develop hot spots, which are local areas of inflamed infected skin as a result of natural bacteria overdose. He didn't catch a bacteria. It's his own natural skin bacteria that has gone crazy in one area.

Pets with seasonal allergies oftentimes also have problems with their ears and feet. The ear canals become very itchy and inflamed. They can become infected with yeast or bacteria as well. Very, very common for animals in small type areas. That's where bacteria and yeast like to have a party. Between the nail beds as armpits are a bit common issue, but ears are a real problematic source of issues for pets dealing with an allergic response.

Symptoms

Symptoms of a potential ear infection includes scratching of the ears, aggressive head shaking, hair loss around the ears, and a bad smell coming from the ears. There can also be discharge and the pet is so obsessed with body itching that they're not shaking their heads. If you look at your pet's ears and see any discharge or debris at all, you need to be concerned about something going on inside your pet's ears.

Because dogs and cats sweat from the pads of their feet, the bottom of their feet, when they go outside, they tend to pick up thousands of allergens. Not only do they attract those allergens back inside the home, which can contaminate your home, but those allergens become incredibly itchy.

There can be a lot of excessive licking or chewing on pet's feet as well. The excessive licking and chewing can spark a secondary yeast infection on your dog's feet. Oftentimes you'll know that because they'll smell like cheese popcorn or corn chips. There's a really musty stinky odor coming from your pet's feet. That's yeast.

Although not as common, some pets particularly kitties can actually develop a lot of common symptoms for humans – runny eyes, watery eyes, sneezing, and coughing. Dogs can develop that too but more so cats.

Natural Tips

There are seven common sense things that you can do for allergic pets to help ease their discomfort when it comes to seasonal allergy responses.

Address your pet's diet. The very first thing I do with a dog or cat dealing with allergies is to review their diet and assess the situation for the possibility of leaky gut. Leaky gut syndrome, which is also called dysbiosis, is

oftentimes the reason that seasonal allergies get progressively worse year after year.

If you have a dog that's two and used to be just a little itchy May and June; at three, it's May, June, July, and August; and then at four, it's year-round, you need to think about the potential of leaky gut playing into why the allergic response is progressing.

Your pet's GI tract has the very important job of discernment, which means your pet has to know what to allow into the body and what to keep out. Those of you that have dogs know that they eat anything. The goal of a pet's GI tract is to allow nutrients in but to keep out allergens. There are a lot of reasons why pet's GI tracts can become confused and leaky, which means allow allergens into their systems.

But oftentimes medications can prompt leaky gut syndrome. Antibiotics are a big cause for leaky gut syndrome in pets. Other medications can also create a leaky gut situation. Any pet on chronic drugs, you need to be thinking about the potential for it disrupting the microbiome in your pet's GI tract, which can facilitate a leaky gut reaction. Certainly processed foods containing genetically modified ingredients are among the most common reasons I see leaky gut in pets across the board.

In my opinion, all animals with any allergic response should be transitioned to an anti-inflammatory diet. Diets that create or worsen inflammation are high in carbohydrates. Your allergic pet's diet should be very low in grain content. You need to flip over the bag and make sure you're reading. Even if it says "grain-free", you're not off the hook. The label needs to say "no soy, no corn, no rice, no wheat, no organic whole wheat, no tapioca, no pea, no lentil, no chickpeas," and of course, "no potatoes."

If you adhere to Chinese food energetics or Chinese food theory, you're also going to want to avoid energetically hot foods or foods that can manifest or increase an inflammatory response. Most of the time across the board, this means avoiding chicken.

By eliminating extra sugar or carbohydrates in the diet, you'll also limit the food supply for yeast, which can actually be very beneficial for itchy dogs.

The second thing you can do for an animal dealing with an allergic reaction is to provide a source of omega-3 fatty acids. The best source of omega-3 fatty acids comes from the oceans. Krill oil, salmon oil, tuna oil, anchovy oil, sardine oil, and other sources of fish body oils are all really great sources of omega-3s for dogs and cats. Make sure that your omega-3s are tested for purity, as well as sustainably sourced, and ideally come from a capsule or an airless pump to avoid rancidity issues with pour-on oils.

I also recommend coconut oil for allergic pets because it contains lauric acid. Lauric acid actually naturally is an anti-fungal part of coconut oil, which can help suppress the production of yeast in your pet's body. Using an omega-3 fatty acid like fish body oils with coconut oil can actually moderate or even suppress the inflammatory response in pets, which is a great natural option when it comes to an allergic pet.

Offering your pet clean, pure drinking water is really important. It's important that your pet is not consuming fluoride, fluorine, heavy metals, or any other contaminants for that matter. If you are not currently filtering your dog or cat's water and they have an allergic response, it's one of the most important things you can do in conjunction to changing the diet: to eliminate potential chemicals coming in thru water.

The third thing you can do is to protect your pet's immune system. Because allergies are an exaggerated immune system – the definition of an allergy is an immune system overreaction – it's really important to not unintentionally stimulate or confuse your pet's immune system beyond what already is.

This means avoiding unnecessary vaccines and veterinary drugs, including chemical pest preventives. Vaccines by nature stimulate your pet's immune system, which is the last thing an allergic pet needs. I recommend instead that you talk to your integrative veterinarian about titers to measure your pet's immunity as an alternative to automatically vaccinating.

If your pet is taking medication regularly or if he or she is on long-term medication in the past or even now, talk to your veterinarian about doing what I call damage control, which means providing organ support for certain drugs or supplying an intermittent detox program to help the body eliminate harmful byproducts of drug residues.

The fourth thing you can do is to manually remove allergens yourself. Now, you think that this often overlooked super commonsense approach would be a vet's first suggestion for contact allergies. But I find that very few conventional veterinarians actually take advantage of this free and really effective approach. It's called irrigation therapy.

We use it in human medicine. People that have contact allergies, dermatologists say, "Take a shower twice a day. Rinse those allergens off of your body." It just seems so easy and simple. For some reason, we don't recommend it in veterinary medicine. It is a pain, but it's highly effective and free.

Pets who go outside regularly collect millions of allergens. You can't see them, but because pets are fussy and because they're Swiffer-ing their yard, all of those allergens are stuck on your pet's fur. When they come inside, they're spreading allergens all over their body but also those allergens are profoundly irritating to their skin. A commonsense approach is just to rinse them off. Just by rinsing or hosing off your dog, you can provide immediate relief for irritated, inflamed skin.

Frequent bathing or lathering up your dog is actually a really great commonsense, almost-free approach that can also help dramatically reduce allergen level in the body while also preventing secondary bacterial infections. Of course, I recommend you only use grain-free and pH balanced shampoo. Because oatmeal is a carbohydrate and because carbs feed yeast, I don't recommend oatmeal shampoos for any allergic dogs.

Foot soaks, especially if the only symptom of your pet's seasonal allergic response is itchy feet, foot soaks are super great commonsense way to reduce the amount of allergens that your pet trek into the house, but also it's a great way to just commonsense reduce the amounts of allergens and irritations on your dog's feet.

You can do foot soaks in a myriad of different ways. I have a whole different video on how to set up a foot soak, but by you allowing your dog to rinse off his feet, I use dilute Betadine in a solution. You can put up a sweater box right outside your home, put up a hose in it, add some Betadine to it, so it's ice tea color. You parading your dog through a Betadine solution for just a few seconds after he comes in from outside, patting them dry, and letting him back into the home, you can dramatically reduce how irritated, potentially infected, and certainly how inflamed your pet's paws can be.

In fact, I have been able to manage many of my seasonally allergic dogs by foot soaks alone in my practice.

Now if you live in a condo or in an apartment and you don't have access to be able to set something outside your door, you can use a coffee can inside your home. You can pop your dog in your shower or bath tub. The commonsense theory behind this is: your pet's digging at his feet. If we know outdoor allergens are the root cause of the issue, you manually removing those allergens from those pet's feet provide tremendous relief and is a really commonsense approach for avoiding drugs.

Eye rinses can also be really effective. For animals that are pawing or digging at their eyes, performing a regular

eye rinse like once a day is a great commonsense cheap solution. It's very important obviously that you not use a human medicated eye drops. There's a great all-natural over-the-counter eye drop that's made by Halo Pets that can reduce eye irritation and inflammation. Great idea to do that as needed if your pet's digging at his eyes.

The fifth thing you can do is to reduce allergens and toxins around the home or in your pet's immediate environment. Vacuum all your carpets, rugs, and upholstery. Clean your hardwood floors and wash your pet's bedding or even your human bedding if your pet's sleeping on it, at least once a week during allergy season.

Keeping the areas of your home very, very clean where your pet spends most of his time is really important, because the goal is to reduce the indoor allergen load as much as possible. Obviously, use a non-toxic cleaning agent. Make sure that you're not adding anything toxic in the home, which can create multiple chemical hypersensitivities for pets. Swap out any toxic household cleaners for organic cleaners. Really good idea.

During allergy season, it's a great idea to keep your windows closed as much as possible and to change the filters on your home heating unit or air circulation unit as often as possible. But in addition to that, getting an air purifier for the area where your pet's immediately in can actually be a great way to decrease environmental allergens as well as dust mites.

Cover your pet's bedding with a dust mite cover. You put your pet's bed inside a dust mite cover. That's a great way to unzip and keep your pet on a really hypoallergenic surface that can dramatically reduce irritation coming from the environment.

I also recommend that if you purchase your pet's bed at a Big Box store, I can promise you it's coming from China and has probably been sprayed with flame retardants. Switching to an organic pet bed is a great way, especially if your pet has irritated and inflamed paws or skin. A great way to keep a secondary pretty toxic inflammatory chemical away from your pet's irritated and inflamed skin.

Last, I recommend that you consider offering natural antihistamine support. There are some supplements that I very routinely prescribe to pets with seasonal allergic issues starting with quercetin, which is a bioflavonoid with anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and anti-histamine properties. I actually call it nature's Benadryl because it's really effective at suppressing histamine release.

Histamine is what causes inflammation redness and irritation associated with an allergic response. By down-regulating histamine production and expression, your pet's going to be less red, less irritated. Bromaline and papain are two proteolytic enzymes that increase the absorption of quercetin making it more effective. I like to combine those proteolytic enzymes with vitamin C and quercetin, because they have a great synergistic effect.

They also suppress prostaglandin release, which in turn decreases the pain and inflammation of irritated mucus membranes and other parts of the body over time. Other herbs such as stinging nettle, butterbur, sorrel, verbena, elder flower, and cat's claw have actually a really rich herbal history of helping mammals combat seasonal allergic responses. Historically those have been used in humans but in the last hundred years, veterinary herbalists have transposed them for dogs and cats with really nice success.

Plants sterols and plant sterolins, which are the anti-inflammatory aspects of plants have also been used successfully to modulate the immune system into more of a healthy balanced response if your pet is dealing with an environmental allergic response. Using the anti-inflammatory aspects of plants can actually help reduce inflammation in your pets.

Local honey actually contains a small amount of pollen from the local area that can help desensitize the body to

local allergens over time. In my opinion, the very best place to find local honey would be at your farmer's market, or your small family owned health food store. Check with your veterinarian the dose to give your dog or cat. It's a great way to naturally help desensitize your pet to local allergens.

Now, if you find that you've tried all of my above suggestions with absolutely no success, the next step is to help your pet's immune system quiet down by desensitization. That's done either through a technique called Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Techniques (NAET) (which is an allergy elimination technique performed by practitioners trained to do so in dogs or cats) or through sublingual immunotherapy.

Sublingual immunotherapy is also called SLIT. It's a relatively new variation of allergy shots or allergy injections to cure atopic dermatitis, which is skin allergies. It's used successfully in dogs and cats as well as horses. But it's been used extensively in Europe for the last many, many, many years to treat humans very successfully without the use of a needle. We like that for dogs and cats as well as horses.

Sublingual therapy is wonderful because you just deliver the micro dose of allergen orally. Under the tongue or in the mouth, which saves you the frustration of having to poke your pet with a needle. I've had very good success using this particular therapy and actually a brand called RESPIT, which is regionally specific immunotherapy. I like this because it doesn't rely on an allergy test to determine what your dog or cat is allergic to. It actually uses a mixture of the most significant regional allergens.

For example, if you just moved to the Midwest in the middle of ragweed season and your dog is suffering miserably, this may be a great option or alternative and it's a great chemical-free natural option to help desensitize your dog. If your pet has been diagnosed with atopic dermatitis, I would recommend that you talk to your veterinarian about sublingual immunotherapy which can absolutely and potentially over time resolve and completely fix or cure an underlying environmental allergy instead of just addressing your pet's symptoms which oftentimes can become progressively worse year after year.

When you do decide to use sublingual immunotherapy, most pets do need something immediately right now to help relieve their irritation. I do recommend that if you start with immunotherapy, you also include bathing, herbs, or nutraceutical therapies to help reduce inflammation in addition to beginning a desensitization protocol.