

Help! My Pet Is Miserably Itchy, Could It Be Allergies?

Humans who suffer from seasonal allergies react much differently than a dog or cat experiencing an allergic response. With pets, the itching and scratching can lead to inflamed skin and even a secondary infection. Here are seven natural steps you can take to help ease your pet's discomfort.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A furry family member with seasonal allergies often expresses them through the skin; left untreated, seasonal allergies often progress to year-round allergies
- Allergic pets are typically very itchy, and the itch-scratch cycle results in irritated, inflamed skin that can trigger secondary bacterial infections
- There are a number of simple, all-natural steps pet parents of an allergic dog or cat can take to relieve their discomfort
- The first step is to address the animal's diet and the possibility of leaky gut syndrome
- Other steps include avoiding all unnecessary vaccines and veterinary drugs, provide irrigation therapy, and offer natural antihistamine support

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, the symptoms can be quite diverse, but most often they are expressed as a condition called atopic or **allergic dermatitis**, which is irritation or inflammation of the skin.

How to Tell If Your Pet's Problem Is Allergies

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

As the itching and scratching gets progressively worse, the skin becomes inflamed and tender, and secondary infections can develop. There might be areas of hair loss, open sores, or sores that have scabbed over. He might develop **hot spots**, which are areas of inflamed, infected skin resulting from overgrowth of normal skin bacteria.

Pets with seasonal allergies often also have problems with their ears and feet. The ear canals become itchy and inflamed, and they often become infected with yeast or bacteria.

Symptoms of a possible ear infection include scratching at the ears, aggressive head shaking, hair loss around the ears, and a bad smell or discharge coming from the ears.

Because dogs and cats sweat from the pads of their feet, when they go outside, allergens cling to their paws. Those allergens get tracked back inside and all around your home, and are a major source of your pet's itchiness.

Allergic pets often lick or chew at their feet. The excessive licking and chewing can spark a secondary **yeast infection** on the feet. If your pet's feet start smelling musty, or like cheese popcorn or corn chips, chances are he's developed a yeast infection.

Although it's not common, some pets, especially cats, can develop symptoms similar to those of an allergic human, such as a runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing, and coughing.

Natural Treatments for Pets With Allergies

The following are 7 common sense, all natural steps you can take to help ease your pet's discomfort when she's dealing with seasonal allergies.

1. The first thing I do with a dog or cat with allergies is review their diet and assess for the possibility of **leaky gut syndrome**. Often dysbiosis, which is also called leaky gut, is the reason seasonal allergies get progressively worse from one year to the next.

For example, let's say a 2-year-old dog is just a little itchy in May and June. By the time she's 3, she's itchy from May through August. At age 4, she's itchy year-round. This is a pet who should be evaluated for leaky gut, because it's very likely playing a big role in the worsening of her allergies as she matures.

Your pet's gastrointestinal (GI) tract has the very important job of discerning what nutrients to allow into the bloodstream, and which to keep out (as we know, many dogs will eat anything). The job of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract is to allow nutrients in while keeping allergens out.

When the gut starts to "leak," it means it's allowing allergens into the bloodstream. Often, medications – especially antibiotics and steroids — cause leaky gut syndrome. Any pet on routine drug therapy should be assessed for a leaky gut.

There's a **canine dysbiosis test** from Texas A&M GI lab you can use to test for this condition if you're unsure if your pet is affected, but even better, you can **check your pet's microbiome**, which in my experience is almost always abnormal in atopic dermatitis patients.

Another trigger that research shows contributes to leaky gut and atopic dermatitis is an ultraprocessed diet containing the pro-inflammatory byproducts of high heat processing (**AGES**).¹ Pets with allergies should be transitioned to a minimally processed (low or no heat), anti-inflammatory diet. Diets that create or worsen inflammation are highly refined (kibble), high in carbohydrates, and contain more omega-6 fatty acids than omega-3 fatty acids (DHA and EPA).

Your allergic pet's diet should be very low in grain content. If the package label says "grain-free," that's a good start, but it should also say no soy, no corn, no rice, no wheat, no organic whole wheat, no tapioca, no peas, no lentils, no chickpeas, and no potatoes. Do the **Carb Equation** and make sure you're feeding less than 20% starch in your pet food, and preferably 10%.

If you adhere to Chinese food energetics or Chinese food theory, you will also want to avoid energetically hot foods or foods that can manifest or increase an inflammatory response. This usually means avoiding chicken.

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

2. The second thing I recommend is reducing sources of omega-6 fatty acids (chicken and seed oils) and boosting the **omega-3 fatty acids** in your pet's diet. The best sources of these fatty acids come from the ocean, including krill, salmon, tuna, anchovy, and sardine oil, and other sources of fish body oils. Pet foods never contain enough EPA or DHA because they go rancid quickly, so adequate amounts should be added at the time of feeding.

Make sure the omega-3s you offer your pet are tested for purity, are sustainably sourced, and ideally come from a capsule or an airless pump to avoid the rancidity issues we see with pour-on oils. I am a fan of sustainably sourced krill oil, because it contains skin-enhancing phospholipids.

I also recommend **coconut oil** for allergic pets because it contains lauric acid, which has natural anti-fungal properties that can help suppress the production of yeast in your pet's body. Omega-3 oils combined with coconut oil can moderate or even suppress the inflammatory response in allergic pets.

It's also important to offer your pet clean, pure drinking water that doesn't contain fluoride, fluorine, heavy metals, or other contaminants. If you're not currently filtering your dog or cat's drinking water and she has seasonal allergies, I highly recommend you improve the quality of the water she's drinking.

3. Because allergies are an exaggerated immune system response (the definition of an allergy is an immune system overreaction), it's important not to add to the problem. This means avoiding unnecessary vaccines and veterinary drugs, including chemical pest preventives.

Vaccines are designed to stimulate the immune system, which is the last thing an allergic animal needs. Instead, I recommend talking to your integrative veterinarian about **titer tests** to measure your pet's immunity as an alternative to automatically vaccinating.

If your pet is taking medication regularly or has taken a long-term course of medication in the past, talk to your veterinarian about instituting what I call "damage control," which means providing organ support or an intermittent detoxification program to help your pet's body eliminate harmful byproducts and drug residues.

4. The fourth thing you can do is help rid your pet's body of allergens. Interestingly, I find that very few conventional veterinarians recommend this free and quite effective approach to managing a pet's allergies. It's called irrigation therapy.

We use it in human medicine. Dermatologists recommend that people with contact allergies shower twice a day to rinse the allergens off the body. But for some reason, it isn't suggested for itchy veterinary patients. It can be kind of a pain to do, but it's well worth it.

Pets who go outside regularly collect millions of allergens. You can't see them, but those allergens are riding around on your pet's fur. When she comes inside, the allergens come in with her. A commonsense approach is to rinse them off, which can provide immediate relief for irritated, inflamed skin.

I also recommend following up with a lemon juice or vinegar rinse to help manage yeast infections: add 1 cup

lemon juice or vinegar to 1 gallon water. Pour over your dog after a bath, avoiding the head. Massage into skin and towel dry.

Frequent baths also wash away allergens on the coat and skin, and can dramatically reduce allergen levels on and in your pet's body, while also preventing secondary bacterial infections. I recommend using only organic, grain-free and pH balanced shampoos. Because oatmeal is a carbohydrate and carbs feed yeast, I don't recommend oatmeal shampoos.

Foot soaks, especially if the only symptom of your pet's seasonal allergies is itchy feet, are a great way to reduce the amount of allergens your pet tracks into the house and spreads all over her indoor environment.

If your pet is prone to licking and chewing her feet, this is a great way to reduce the potential for infected nail beds, interdigital cysts, and inflamed, swollen pads.

You can set up a foot soak right outside the door and make sure your dog stands in the soothing, disinfecting wash before he comes into the house. Believe it or not, this simple routine has kept many of my seasonal allergy patients off medications all summer long.

If you happen to live in a condo or apartment and can't set up a foot soak outside your door, instead, you can use a coffee can inside your home. Or you can pop your dog in your shower or bathtub.

The commonsense theory behind this is: If we know outdoor allergens are the reason a pet is obsessively licking and chewing his itchy feet, manually removing those allergens provides tremendous, drug-free relief.

Removing allergens from the face can also be very effective for pets who are pawing at their eyes. It's very important that you not use human medicated eye drops. Colloidal silver is a great way to safely disinfect your pet's face and delicate areas around the eyes.

5. The fifth thing you can do to help your allergic pet is reduce allergens and toxins around your home and in your dog's or cat's immediate environment. Vacuum all carpets, rugs, and upholstery, clean hard floors, and wash pet and human bedding a minimum of once a week.

Keep the areas of your home where your pet spends most of her time as allergen-free as possible. Use nontoxic cleaning agents instead of traditional household cleaners. Make sure that you're not adding anything toxic in your home environment that could create multiple chemical hypersensitivities in your pet.

During allergy season, keep windows closed as much as possible, and change the filters on your heating or air circulation unit often. Invest in an air purifier to remove allergens inside the house.

Consider covering your pet's bed with a dust mite cover that can be frequently washed to help reduce allergen contamination that she may be bringing in from outside.

6. Number six is to offer natural antihistamine support to your pet. There are supplements I routinely prescribe to pets with seasonal allergic issues starting with quercetin, which is a bioflavonoid with anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antihistamine properties. I call it "nature's Benadryl," because it's very effective at suppressing histamine release.

Histamine is what causes the inflammation, redness, and irritation associated with an allergic response. Down-

regulating histamine production and expression will make your pet feel more comfortable.

Bromelain and papain are proteolytic enzymes that increase absorption of quercetin, making it more effective. I like to combine bromelain and papain 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 areas of the body.

Herbs such as stinging nettle, butterbur, sorrel, verbena, chickweed, and cat's claw have a documented history of helping animals combat seasonal allergic responses. Long ago these herbs were used only in humans, but in the last hundred years, veterinary herbalists have successfully used them with dogs and cats as well. There are many Chinese herbal formulas that can also help.

Plant sterols and sterolins, which are anti-inflammatory agents, have also been used successfully to modulate the immune system toward a more balanced response in allergic patients.

Locally produced honey contains a small amount of pollen from the local area that can help desensitize the body to local allergens over time. Usually the best place to find local honey is at a farmer's market or neighborhood health food store. Check with your veterinarian about the right dose for your dog or cat.

7. Finally, if you've tried some or all of the above suggestions with no success, I recommend helping your pet's immune system quiet down through desensitization.

This can be achieved through a technique called Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Techniques (NAET) performed by practitioners trained to treat dogs and cats, or through sublingual immunotherapy.

Sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) is a relatively new variation on allergy injections to treat atopic dermatitis (skin allergies) in dogs, cats, and horses. SLIT is common in Europe and is used to treat respiratory and skin allergies in people.

Sublingual immunotherapy is given orally, which is much easier on both you and your pet than injections. It's delivered with a metered pump dispenser that sprays a few drops of allergen solution onto the tissues under and around the tongue.

I've had good success using a sublingual product called **regionally-specific immunotherapy**, or RESPIT®. I like it because it doesn't rely on testing to determine what your dog or cat is allergic to. It uses a mixture of the most significant regional allergens instead.

So for example, if you've just moved to the Midwest in the middle of ragweed season and your dog is suffering miserably, this may be a great chemical-free 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 potentially over time resolve the underlying allergy instead of just addressing the symptoms.

If you decide to use sublingual immunotherapy, it's important to know that most pets require an "immediate

relief" protocol (including therapeutic bathing, herbs and nutraceuticals that reduce inflammation), in addition to beginning a desensitization protocol of any kind.

Desensitizing pets is one of the best long-term solutions for managing allergies, and sublingual immunotherapy is a needle-free option.

Sources and References

¹ [Phys.org, November 13, 2020](#)
