

# Put an End to Tormenting Itchy Skin and Incessant Scratching

You wouldn't ignore this if this happened to you. So take heed when it's your poor pet. And discover the hidden reason behind the itchy torment. Otherwise, not only will she be miserable, but through constant scratching she could create a secondary infection.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Both cats and dogs can develop itchy, inflamed skin, but often the underlying cause is different
- Dogs tend to itch as a result of allergies, whereas the root cause of your cat's itching is just as likely to be something other than an allergy
- Skin conditions that commonly cause itching in cats include pemphigus foliaceus, ringworm, chin acne, eosinophilic granuloma complex and parasites
- Helping your itchy cat means getting an accurate veterinary diagnosis of the underlying cause, coupled with an effective wound healing protocol
- An itchy cat's diet should be anti-inflammatory (low in grains and potato-free), and should be supplemented with a fish body oil and coconut oil

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As I often discuss here at Mercola Healthy Pets, cats are physiologically unique creatures, different in almost every way from their canine counterparts. Many pet parents tend to think of kitties as just small dogs, but nothing could be further from the truth.

That's why it's always best to assume nothing that applies to your dog automatically also applies to your cat. For example, a medication you give to your canine companion should never be given to your cat. The same goes for chemical flea/tick preventives.

You should also avoid feeding dog food to your cat (and vice-versa) unless you're really in a bind and it's a one-time thing.

And while today's dogs and cats tend to develop many of the same health problems, for example, dental disease, or diabetes in overweight pets, often what causes a given disorder in a dog is different than the underlying cause of the same disease in a kitty.

One condition in which this is often true is pruritus, which is the medical term for severely itchy skin. Itchy skin in a dog can almost always be traced to an allergy to either something in his diet, or in the environment.

Cats, like dogs, can certainly develop allergies that make them itchy, but there are a number of other conditions that are just as likely to cause itching in kitties.

## 5 Conditions That Can Make Your Cat Itch

1. One of the most common manifestations of allergies in dogs is severely itchy, inflamed feet or paws, a condition called pododermatitis. However, if your kitty has itchy feet, the underlying cause is more likely to be **pemphigus foliaceus**, which is an autoimmune skin disorder.

Pemphigus foliaceus causes scaly, crusty skin, as well as pustules, mild ulceration and footpad overgrowth and cracking.

2. Another quite common reason for itching in cats is **ringworm**, also called dermatophytosis, which is a fungal infection that can affect the hair, skin or nails.

Ringworm is actually the most common contagious skin infection in kitties. The classic appearance of ringworm is a small, round and hairless sore on the skin. The sore may have a scaly appearance at the center, and also small abscesses. These lesions are most often seen on the head, ears and tail.

3. Another itchy condition seen in cats is **feline acne**, also called chin acne or kitty acne, in which blackheads develop on the chin. Hair follicles become clogged with oil (sebum) from the sebaceous glands, which results in blackheads.

The blackheads can turn into red, itchy bumps, which can progress to pimples, which can progress to abscesses that rupture and become crusty. Once the condition has reached this advanced stage, it's called furunculosis.

In severe cases of chin acne, swelling, hair loss and draining tracts can develop. The area can be very itchy, and cats can cause additional trauma by scratching. Secondary bacterial infections are common with this condition.

4. Feline **eosinophilic granuloma complex** is a condition in which excessive numbers of eosinophils (a type of white blood cell) are produced. The disorder in cats is actually three different syndromes that cause inflammation of the skin:

- Eosinophilic plaque, which features defined, raised, round or oval-shaped sores that are often ulcerated. These lesions are typically found on a cat's abdomen or thighs, and contain eosinophils.
- Eosinophilic granuloma, which describes a mass or lumpy sore containing eosinophils, is usually found on the back of the thighs, the face or inside the mouth.
- Indolent ulcer, which is a defined, abscessed lesion that is most often found on the upper lip.

5. **Parasites**, including fleas and mites, are a very common cause of itching in cats. If you have an itchy cat who goes outdoors at all, she could have a flea allergy even if you don't find evidence of fleas or flea dirt.

Some cats are such efficient groomers they can remove all traces of fleas and their dirt before they have a reaction.

It's safe to assume that if your cat is itchy, she's sensitive to fleas. If she has flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), she's super-sensitive, and the bite of just one flea can leave her itchy and miserable.

## Helping Your Itchy Cat

To successfully alleviate your cat's itchiness, it's imperative to accurately identify and treat the underlying cause. So your first stop will be your veterinarian's office for a thorough workup and hopefully, a quick and definitive diagnosis.

Regardless of the underlying cause, the next thing you'll want to do is begin healing your cat's wounded skin. This means she'll need to wear an E-collar to interrupt the itch-lick-scratch cycle. An alternative might be a light, non-stick bandage or even an infant-sized T-shirt.

Keeping the wound clean is absolutely essential. I recommend disinfecting the area with dilute Betadine (povidone iodine) twice a day. Topical remedies I recommend for wound healing in kitties include:

- Manuka honey applied to the area twice a day
- **Willard Water** or colloidal silver sprayed on the wound several times a day
- Hypericum or calendula cream or tinctures

The E-collar, non-stick bandage or infant T-shirt should be ready to go before you put the healing balm on your cat to prevent her from immediately licking it off.

There are also a number of homeopathic remedies that can be very beneficial for itchy cats, so I encourage you to work with a **homeopath** to find the right one for your kitty.

In my opinion, over-vaccination is one of the biggest abnormal immune system triggers, so detoxing from vaccines (as well as avoiding further unnecessary vaccines) is very important.

## Is Your Cat Eating a Diet That Promotes Healthy Skin?

Regardless of the underlying cause of a cat's skin condition, I always review the diet as part of my workup to see what changes might promote healing and prevent a recurrence.

Animals with itchy skin should be fed an anti-inflammatory diet. Diets that create or worsen inflammation are high in carbohydrates. If you think your cat's diet could be contributing to her skin condition, I recommend looking into a NutriScan test.

Your cat's diet should be very low in grain content and potato-free. Omega-3 fatty acids decrease inflammation throughout the body, so adding them into the diet of a cat with a skin disorder can be very beneficial. The best sources of omega-3 are krill oil, salmon oil, tuna oil, anchovy oil, sardine oil and other fish body oils.

I also recommend coconut oil because it contains lauric acid, which helps decrease the body's production of yeast. Using fish body oil with coconut oil can help moderate or even suppress the inflammatory response.

### Sources and References

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