

## Are These Common Skin Problems Making Your Dog Itchy?

Around this time of year, many dogs start experiencing itchy or flaky skin issues, but there isn't just one potential cause. These 5 common skin conditions can make your dog uncomfortable anytime during the year, & even lead to other alarming signs. Beware, one of these conditions can be contagious.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

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### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Skin is one of the largest and most extensive organ systems of the body, which is why it's no surprise that canine family members, like their humans, can develop many different types of skin conditions
- Five of the most common skin disorders in dogs include hot spots, hair loss, atopic dermatitis, flaky skin and a dull/dry coat, and mange
- If your dog has a skin condition, it's important to identify what it is and what's causing it so that it can be successfully resolved

Our dogs are a lot like us in that they're prone to a variety of skin conditions. Another thing we have in common with our furry BFFs is that skin disorders can run the gamut from harmless to strange and unusual to deadly serious.

Five of the most common skin disorders in dogs include hot spots, hair loss, atopic dermatitis, flaky skin and a dull/dry coat, and mange.

### Hot Spots

A hot spot on your dog is a raw, painful area of skin that is usually an angry red color, and the hair has often been licked, rubbed, or bitten off. The area over and around the hot spot is typically crusty and foul-smelling. The medical term for hot spots is pyotraumatic dermatitis or superficial pyoderma. But hot spot is a much better descriptive term for your pet's inflamed, infected skin.

Just about anything that causes your dog to scratch, lick or bite at an area of skin until it is irritated and inflamed sets the stage for a hot spot. These sores are also created when an overgrowth of natural bacteria develops on the skin. When an infection arises from a dog's own bacteria, there's almost always a root cause. Hot spots often occur in dogs with unbalanced immune systems.

Once the skin is red and raw, it's primed for infection, which creates a vicious cycle of itching, scratching and further injury to the skin. Hot spots tend to be very painful and sensitive to the touch. Any dog can develop the condition, but it's most commonly seen in dogs with thick coats, dirty and/or moist skin, and dogs with allergies and systemic inflammation, including flea allergies.

Successfully treating hot spots requires healing the wound by shaving the hair around it, disinfecting it, applying a soothing topical solution, and protecting it from further injury by your dog. It's also critical to try to identify and resolve the root cause to prevent a recurrence.

## Hair Loss

Some dogs are hairless by design, like the Chinese Crested, the Xolo (Mexican Hairless) and the American Hairless Terrier.

There are also breeds with an inherited tendency toward patchy or pattern baldness, typically on the lower neck, chest, back, thigh, between the eyes and ears, or on the outer ear. These breeds include the Chihuahua, Dachshund, Doberman Pinscher, Italian Greyhound and Whippet.

And then there are dogs whose coats start thinning or falling out as a result of an underlying condition such as itchy skin, pressure sores, a drug or vaccine reaction, hypothyroidism, Alopecia X (an endocrine disorder), Cushing's disease and atypical adrenal disease (hyperadrenocorticism), or Addison's disease (hypoadrenocorticism).

Bottom line, if your dog's coat begins to thin or fall out, or it doesn't regrow after being clipped, it's important to make an appointment with your veterinarian as soon as possible.

## Atopic Dermatitis (Itchy Skin)

If your dog suffers from itchy skin, either seasonally or year-round, he has lots of company. Atopic dermatitis (the technical name for itchy skin possibly rooted in a genetic disposition) is a growing problem in today's pets, especially dogs.

A dog with very itchy skin can develop lesions, especially if he scratches a lot. Atopic dermatitis is most often caused by a hypersensitivity to either food or environmental allergens, including pollens, molds, dust mites, and insect antigens. In my experience and that of other integrative veterinarians, chemical hypersensitivities can also play a role in the condition.

It's important to try to discover the underlying cause of your pet's atopic dermatitis, whether it's dietary or environmental. Many integrative veterinarians see tremendous improvement in symptoms by eliminating pro-inflammatory and GMO sources of grains and excessive starch consumption, **toxic processing techniques**, in addition to adding DHA and EPA (omega-3 essential fats) to a fresh, human grade meat-based diet.

Checking your dog's microbiome can also be enlightening, since research shows the microbiome contributes to a healthy gut-skin axis, and an offshoot of dysbiosis is often recurrent skin and yeast issues.

In the meantime, for symptom relief, I always opt for safe, natural remedies rather than immuno-suppressant drugs.

## Flaky Skin and Dull, Dry Coat

Typically, a dog's flaky skin and dry coat are due to one or more factors, including insufficient grooming, infrequent bathing or (rarely) overbathing, a dietary deficiency, or an underlying medical disorder.

If your pet's coat isn't regularly groomed, dead flaky skin tends to accumulate. This is especially a problem for dogs with double coats, because the thick long undercoat can collect and hide lots of dead skin.

Too many or too few baths can cause excessively flaky skin. A good rule of thumb is that your dog should be bathed "as often as he needs it." Some dogs rarely need a bath, while others with oily or flaky skin and hair should be bathed at least weekly. The condition of his skin and coat should dictate how often he gets a bath.

**Select a gentle, organic shampoo** specifically designed for pets. You might also want to follow up with an all-natural, species-specific conditioner to moisturize and condition the skin and coat.

Lack of sufficient omega-3 fatty acids (DHA and EPA) in the diet is also a common cause of excessively flaky skin. Dogs need an abundance of omega-3s to be healthy from the inside out. Whether you feed a commercial or homemade diet, most dogs benefit from supplemental essential fatty acids. My favorite is sustainably sourced **krill oil**, if you can't feed wild caught salmon or **sardines** several times a week.

Another reason for excessive flaking in dogs is an underlying medical problem, such as metabolic conditions that inhibit the skin's turnover rate. Thyroid disease is a common cause of flaky skin, including hypothyroidism in dogs.

Skin infections are another very common medical cause of flaking. Bacterial infections, fungal infections like ringworm, and parasitic infections on the skin can all cause increased flaking.

If your canine companion is dealing with flaky skin and/or a dull, dry coat, work with your integrative veterinarian to identify the root cause so you can resolve the issue and get your pet's skin and coat back to a healthy condition.

## Mange

Dogs can get itchy-scratchy for any number of reasons, but one of the most common is mange. If your furry pal is insanely itchy and his skin is inflamed, he might have one of two types of mange: demodectic or sarcoptic.

Demodectic mange is also called red mange, follicular mange and puppy mange, because it's most often seen in young dogs. It's caused by the mite species *Demodex canis*, which lives inside the hair follicles, and is usually the result of an underdeveloped or suppressed immune system. Thankfully, this form of mange is not considered terribly contagious.

The *Sarcoptes scabiei* mite causes sarcoptic mange, also known as canine scabies. Female mites tunnel into a dog's skin, laying eggs as they go. This causes a significant inflammatory response. Unlike the demodectic mite, sarcoptic mites can live several days off a host's body and up to three weeks in a moist, cool environment. In the average home, they have a two- to six-day life span off a host.

Sarcoptic mange is highly contagious and can infest not only dogs, but also other animals, including cats and people with completely normal immune systems.

Unfortunately, conventional treatment of both sarcoptic and demodectic mange often involves dipping your dog's entire body in a powerful chemical pesticide that kills off the mites.

My recommendation is to consult an integrative veterinarian to explore all less toxic options for eliminating the mites and relieving symptoms. There are natural treatment options available depending on your dog's situation.

## **Sources and References**

[PetMD, June 30, 2020](#)

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