

## The Myth About Dry Noses in Dogs

A dog's nose is typically cold and wet, so it's easy to assume that a dry nose means your dog is ill. While certain health conditions can contribute to a dry nose, there are three other variables that may influence the wetness of your dog's nose.

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### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A dry nose isn't an automatic sign of illness in your dog
- It's perfectly normal for your dog's nose to fluctuate from dry to moist during the day
- The wetness of your dog's nose is influenced by hydration, activity level and environment
- Certain health conditions, including autoimmune disease, hypothyroidism and infections, can contribute to a dry nose
- Excessive nose dryness, crusting, loss of pigmentation or discharge should be checked out by your veterinarian

If your dog was sleeping, her nose will typically be on the drier side when she wakes up, and certain breeds that have a hard time licking their noses — namely brachycephalic breeds like pugs — tend to have drier noses for this reason.<sup>1</sup>

So the wetness of your dog's nose alone is not evidence of your pet's overall health, as you need to take other symptoms into account to gauge whether your pet is feeling well or ill. That being said, there are certain health conditions that may make your dog's nose dry, so it's a good idea to get it checked out if it's a chronic issue or occurs along with other symptoms.

### What Health Conditions May Lead to a Dry Nose?

Sometimes dogs will develop a dry nose along with a fever — but not always, it may also be wet and runny if a fever is present. Pemphigus complex is another condition that can cause dry nose. It's an autoimmune skin disease that occurs in two primary forms — pemphigus foliaceus and pemphigus erythematosus.

Dryness, cracking and bleeding of the nose may occur, though the disease typically start with patches of red skin on the face, including the nose and ears. Lupus, specifically discoid lupus erythematosus, is another autoimmune disease that may cause nose dryness in dogs, particularly collies, German shepherds, huskies, Shetland sheepdogs and Brittany spaniels.

First, the nose loses pigmentation, and then often it develops cracks and sores, nonhealing fissures, and crusting. If your dog has allergies to pollen or certain foods, this could also lead to rubbing or scratching of the face and nose, which could lead to irritation.<sup>2</sup>

If your dog has been out in the sun, a sunburn can also cause a dry, cracked or peeling nose, especially if your dog has light, pink skin. Dogs with pink noses need protection from sunburn during the summer, so apply a safe sunscreen when your dog will be out in the sun. Hypothyroidism can also affect your dog's nose, leading to thickening of the skin of the nose and a leathery appearance. Other causes of nose dryness include:<sup>3</sup>

- **Nasal pyoderma or mucocutaneous pyoderma** — This infection of the nose or nostrils can lead to dryness and cracking, along with nasal discharge.
- **Dry eye syndrome** — A dry nose along with dry eyes that have discharge could be due to dry eye syndrome, also known as keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS).

*"Inadequate tear production due to KCS results in decreased moisture flowing to the nose. There is a simple test for this condition that can be performed right in the exam room. If KCS is confirmed and treated, the dry nose will resolve," Dr. Eileen Fatcher reported in Whole Dog Journal.*<sup>4</sup>

- **Nasal cancer** — A dry, crusty nose may be a sign of nasal cancer such as squamous cell carcinoma.
- **Chronic ear infections** — Ear infections that occur alongside a dry nose could be related. "Dryness of the nasal mucosa, called xeromycteria, can result from injury to the parasympathetic nerves that innervate the nasal mucosal glands. Because these nerves travel close to the middle ear, inflammation associated with infection of the middle ear (otitis media) can damage these nerves," Fatcher explained.<sup>5</sup>
- **Nutritional deficiencies** — Lack of certain nutrients can lead to changes in nose tissue, especially omega-3 fatty acid deficiency, which can cause the nose tissue to become thickened and dry.

## Your Dog's Nose Gives Clues to His Health

While a dry nose isn't typically cause for alarm, don't ignore the many clues your dog's nose provides about her health. Specifically, nasal discharge, especially if it's mucousy or bloody, should get checked out. You also need to stay alert for excessive dryness, crusting or loss of pigmentation. And any changes in the appearance of your dog's nose should also be looked at by your vet.

Sneezing, pawing at the nose, nosebleeds, noisy breathing or a visible lump on either side of your pet's nose, which may be due to a tooth root abscess, also warrant a trip to your veterinarian. If in doubt, it's always better to get your dog's nose looked at to rule out any underlying health conditions.

If you've ruled out other health conditions and your dog's nose still tends to get dry on occasion, topical ointments are typically useless, as your dog will quickly lick them off. You can, however, apply coconut oil to your dog's sniffer or open a vitamin E capsule and apply the contents to your dog's nose for temporary relief.

Keep in mind, too, that dogs and cats are nose breathers, meaning they breathe through their nose when at rest. If your dog's nostrils are flaring while he's breathing, it could be a sign of a breathing issue, which should get checked out by your veterinarian right away.

## Sources and References

<sup>1,3,4,5</sup> [Whole Dog Journal January 20, 2022](#)

<sup>2</sup> [PetMD February 19, 2018](#)

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