

Is Your Dog's Skin Changing and Should You Be Concerned?

Changes in your pet's skin can sometimes be worrying. If you notice these symptoms, it could be this common condition — here's how to manage it properly.

Reviewed by [Dr. Arielle Walton](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Seborrhea is a skin condition that affects keratin production, leading to excessive dandruff, greasy fur and itchy, irritated skin. While lifelong, it can be effectively managed
- Some dogs inherit primary seborrhea, while others develop secondary seborrhea due to allergies, infections or hormonal imbalances. Treatment depends on the underlying cause
- Symptoms include flaky, scaly skin, excessive dandruff, greasy fur, a strong odor and irritation. Commonly affected areas include armpits, belly, skin folds and ears
- Regular baths with chemical-free soap, daily brushing, and remedies like coconut oil, aloe vera and apple cider vinegar can help soothe and restore skin health
- A balanced, species-appropriate diet with omega-3 fatty acids supports skin health, reducing flare-ups and keeping your dog's coat shiny and itch-free

Do you notice your dog scratching incessantly, leaving behind flakes of skin? Do they emit an unusual odor even after you've just bathed them? When you touch their skin, does their fur feel slightly greasy? There's one possible explanation — your dog has dandruff,¹ also known as seborrhea.

Although a common skin condition, seborrhea is not just a cosmetic issue — it can lead to discomfort, as it causes pets to scratch all the time, affecting their quality of life and overall well-being.² If not treated or managed, it can also worsen and could cause their skin to change, making it dry, cracked, and flaky.

If your dog seems to have seborrhea, don't worry — there are ways to deal with this condition effectively. By taking the right steps, you can help your dog feel better, reduce irritation, and keep their skin as healthy as possible.

What Is Canine Seborrhea?

Seborrhea is a skin disorder that affects keratinization, or the way your dog's body produces keratin, to put it simply. This essential protein keeps their skin, hair, and nails strong and healthy, forming a protective outer coating.

However, when keratin production goes out of balance — either your dog is producing too much or too little — it can cause their coat to become flaky, itchy, and sometimes greasy.³ Any dog can be affected; some breeds are more prone to developing it than others.⁴ Unfortunately, it is a lifelong condition; the good news is it can be easily managed.

Seborrhea can be classified into several types, and their distinct differences can affect the course of treatment. For example, pets that are born with this condition due to their genetics have primary seborrhea. In this case, symptoms are seen from a young age and gradually worsen. This type is usually lifelong and is only manageable. Breeds that are known to have the genetic predisposition to primary seborrhea include:

- American Cocker Spaniels
- West Highland White Terriers
- Basset Hounds

On the other hand, some dogs develop seborrhea because of another condition. This is called secondary seborrhea. Allergies, hormonal imbalances, parasites, infections, and vitamin deficiencies are some common causes. Once the underlying issue is addressed, seborrhea can be treated, and your pet's skin can become healthy again.

Seborrhea can also be categorized by the symptoms it causes and its effects on the skin. Seborrheic dermatitis is when the condition causes greasy, red, and inflamed skin. Dry seborrhea is when excessive flakes form, but there's no oily buildup. Lastly, oily seborrhea occurs due to too many skin oils and can cause your pet's fur to become greasy. It also causes a strong odor.

Symptoms of Canine Seborrhea

One of the most common signs is flaky skin — your dog's coat may seem dull and dry, with excessive dandruff or dead skin flakes. The shedding can be so much that their bedding may also have signs of dandruff. The skin also looks scaly and cracked, which can trigger irritation or discomfort.

Greasy, oily, and sticky skin is another sign. The excess oil may cause an odor similar to corn chips. The oily buildup causes bacteria and yeast to thrive, creating an unpleasant scent.

In severe cases, seborrhea causes thick, crusty patches on your skin. These rough, scaly lesions can become itchy and inflamed, and when your dog excessively scratches on them, they can break the skin, triggering infections to take hold, which makes the condition even worse.

When checking for seborrhea, there are some body areas where the condition is more evident, such as:⁵

- Armpits
- Belly
- Skin folds
- Under the tail
- Between the toes
- Around the ears

You should also check inside the ears. Excessive earwax buildup may be another sign of seborrhea and causes your dog to shake or scratch his head excessively.

How to Treat and Manage Seborrhea Naturally

Treating your dog's seborrhea will require consulting your vet first so they can pinpoint if there are underlying health issues that are triggering this condition. If your dog has hypothyroidism, Cushing's disease, or diabetes, treating that condition will be the priority.⁶

As for managing the symptoms, one crucial aspect is to bathe your pet regularly using a natural, chemical-free soap that preserves the skin's pH level. Instead of using a hair dryer, which dries out the fur and skin, just towel-dry your dog. Daily brushing is also essential. According to Animal Wised:

*"Daily brushing also stimulates the skin, so it is very important to do this regularly. This will naturally produce the essential oils of the skin and distribute them homogeneously throughout the body."*⁷

Other helpful remedies include:⁸

- **Coconut oil** — It has antibacterial and antifungal properties, which help reduce inflammation and moisturize the skin.
- **Aloe vera** — Its healing properties can soothe irritated skin. Use pure aloe vera gel and apply it directly to the affected areas.
- **Apple cider vinegar** — Mix equal parts ACV and water in a spray bottle and spray it on your dog's coat (make sure to avoid their eyes). This will help balance the pH of your dog's skin.

Feeding your pet a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet is also important. Supplement their meals with omega-3 fatty acids like krill oil to keep their skin healthy and fur shiny without too much effort.

Sources and References

^{1,7} [Animal Wised, August 29, 2024](#).

^{2,4,8} [PetCloud, December 24, 2024](#).

^{3,5,6} [PetMD, January 30, 2025](#).
