

Skin Allergies in Dogs

Overview

- A skin allergy is an oversensitivity to items such as pollen, grass, house dust mites and/or certain foods.
- Skin allergies are one of the most common causes of itchy skin in dogs.
- Symptoms tend to include itchiness, redness, hair loss, and repeat skin/ear infections.
- Skin allergy treatment is different for each dog, but often involves avoiding triggers, strict flea control, a special diet, and medication to stop the itch. Immunotherapy (desensitisation) can be used in some cases, but isn't always successful.
- Book an appointment with your vet if your dog has symptoms of a skin allergy.

General information



Skin allergies (also known as allergic skin disease/atopic dermatitis) are one of the most common causes of itchy skin in dogs. If your dog has a skin allergy, this means that they are sensitive to something (or multiple things) that they come into regular contact with, for example:

1. House dust mites
2. Pollens, grass, trees, and moulds
3. Fleas
4. [Food](#)

Most dogs with allergic skin disease are allergic to more than one thing.

Symptoms

Skin allergies can develop in any dog, **at any age**, but are particularly common in certain breeds such as the [West Highland White Terrier](#), [Bichon Frise](#) and [Shar Pei](#). Symptoms usually include:

- [Itchy skin](#)
- [Rashes and redness](#)
- [Hair loss \(alopecia\)](#)
- Infections (skin and [ear infections](#))
- Overgrooming and [saliva stained skin](#)
- Dark, thickened skin
- [Weepy eyes](#)
- [Acute moist dermatitis \(hot spots\)](#)

Diagnosis and allergy testing

It may be tricky to find out exactly what your dog is allergic to, especially as it's likely to be more than one thing. To begin with, your vet will try to rule out certain allergies that can be easily controlled, such as fleabite and food allergies. For example, to rule out [parasites \(such as fleas and mites\)](#), your vet will prescribe a prescription treatment for your dog (you will also need to treat any other pets and your home), and to rule out a food allergy they may suggest a [diet trial/elimination diet](#), which usually needs to happen over an 8-12 week period. It is possible to check for other allergies using blood and skin tests, but unfortunately, this type of testing isn't 100% reliable. The good news is that it's not always necessary to know exact triggers because most skin allergies are treated in a similar fashion.

Treatment

No one size fits all, and every dog with a skin allergy needs a slightly different treatment plan. However, it's likely that your vet will suggest some or all of the following:

Avoid your dog's triggers

If you know what your dog is allergic to, it's best to try to avoid those factors as much as possible. However, even if you don't know what your dog is

allergic to, there are still many things that you can do to reduce the chance of them flaring up:

- Regularly de-flea them (as well as other pets and your home).
- Avoid walking them when the pollen count is high.
- Avoid walking them in long grass (or rinse them off well afterwards).
- Avoid sprays, aerosols, perfumes, and air fresheners in the household.
- Vacuum and dust regularly.
- Feed them a diet specially designed for sensitive skin (recommended by your vet).

Anti-itch medication

There are certain medications that can be used to reduce itchiness, such as:

- [Steroid](#) tablets and spray (such as Prednisolone tablets, Medrone tablets and Cortavance spray).
- Lokivetmab injection (Cytopoint)
- Oclacitinib tablets (Apoquel)

The exact drug your vet prescribes will depend on your dog's symptoms, how long they need to be treated for, and your budget.

Supplements, shampoos and antihistamines

Most dogs with skin allergies benefit from the following:

- A skin supplement containing essential fatty acids
- A topical emollient shampoo (skin calming)
- Daily antihistamines

It's important to be aware that these treatments are often useful when used alongside other treatments (and can reduce the amount of other medications that are needed), but are unlikely to control the problem on their own.

Immunotherapy

If your dog has been allergy tested, it may be possible to desensitise them to their triggers with immunotherapy. Immunotherapy involves injecting your dog with a tiny amount of what they are allergic to, to get their body used to it. The injections work slowly over time, and usually need to be given for a few years (sometimes for life). Unfortunately, immunotherapy doesn't work for every dog, and in many cases, medication is still needed to reduce symptoms. It's also not possible to use immunotherapy for all types of allergy.

Other treatments

- [Antibiotics](#) may be needed if your dog has developed a skin or [ear infection](#).
- Regular [ear cleaning](#) may be necessary if your dog is prone to ear problems.

Outlook

With the right treatment, it's likely that your dog will live a long, happy life. They might have 'flare-ups' from time to time, but these can usually be resolved with additional help and treatment from your vet.

When to contact your vet

It's important to have your dog seen by your vet if you think they might have a skin allergy. Skin problems often get worse over time and left untreated can have a serious effect on quality of life. Always tell your vet if your pet's skin allergy is getting worse, or their medication doesn't seem to be working.

Cost

Lifetime treatment costs for allergic skin disease can mount up to thousands of pounds so it's very important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your dog. There is often more than one treatment option, so if one doesn't work for you and your pet then your vet may be able to offer another.

Consider [insuring your dog](#) as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start, so you have all the support you need to care for them.

Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?

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