

## Allergies in Dog / Dog Skin Problems

It's Springtime; flowers are in full bloom and the tree pollen is everywhere. My allergies are at full force and Taylor has started licking his paws again. Pet allergies, and especially dog skin allergies, are very common. Food, carpeting, blankets, dust mites, mold spores in the air, pollen, plastic food dishes, furniture stuffing and ornamental plants all have the potential to trigger allergies in dogs.

In some instances, a highly allergic pet may have several allergies at once. The severity of allergies, which can be seasonal or year round, varies greatly. The most common symptom from an allergy is intense itching (known as *pruritus*), which may be localized at spots or might be systemic, covering the pet's entire body.

**Contact Allergies.** Fleas are a common source of contact allergies. Other common contact allergens include grasses, hay, plants, and trees. Toxins and chemicals (pesticides, carpet cleaners, etc.) provide additional potential sources for dog skin problems for both outdoor and indoor pets. For a dog that is seldom exposed to fleas, a single fleabite can inflame a dog's skin for several days.

**Food Allergies** are generally due to ingredients in your pet's food or treats. Symptoms of food allergies include itching and/or noticeable digestive trouble. A food allergy can be a reaction to almost any ingredient such as soy, wheat, yeast, or beef. Food allergies are so common that pet food manufacturers have invested millions of dollars in research, development and promotion of diets to help with food allergies in dogs.

**Inhalant Allergies.** With inhalants, pollen is the most common type of allergen, but cigarette smoke, air fresheners, smog, or other airborne pollutants can also be problematic. **Allergic Dermatitis (Dog skin problems caused by allergies)** Regardless of what causes the problem, this condition is common, it can last a lifetime, it is a challenge to diagnose, and once identified it can be resistant to attempts at treatment. Dogs with inhalant dermatitis will lick and chew at their paws and scratch their face, eyelids and ears. Others may erupt in hot spots or their skin may redden and be intensely itchy all over. Sometimes there's a bad smell associated with allergic dermatitis called **seborrhea**, often the result of a secondary infection. Seborrhea is a skin disorder in which the outer layers of the skin, the sebaceous glands, and the follicles are over-productive, leading to dull fur, dry flakiness, and smelly oiliness. This sebum, which becomes rancid, is the source of the odor. Frequent bathing, especially with a harsh shampoo, can irritate the skin and make this condition much worse.

The list of symptoms is endless, but severe itching is the common ailment. Diagnosis of allergies is difficult, time-consuming, very costly, and often inconclusive. As a result, *allergies are seldom properly diagnosed*, and instead, the *symptoms* are treated in hopes of relieving the pet's discomfort.

These treatments may include topical medications, soothing baths, ointments and sprays, oral antihistamines, or steroids. Caution: If you are sent home with a prescription for

cortisone, or your dog has been given “a cortisone shot to stop the itching”, your dog may ultimately be worse off than before if the true diagnosis happens to be an unrecognized case of Sarcoptic mites!

A key point to remember is this: *There is no cure for allergies!* What we can do is avoid the food, material or parasite that is triggering the immune response, and treat *both the symptoms and the resulting infections* to restore the skin to good health.

Always, at the very first sign of itching, look for broken skin, a bite, a sore, or any irritation, and apply a good antiseptic salve or lotion to kill the infection and prevent the irritation from getting worse. In most cases, this is the only remedy you will need.