

Does Your Dog Have Itchy Skin?

by Susan Moss, All The Best Pet Care

Does your dog scratch and bite at himself, creating bare patches where hair doesn't grow? Is the skin red and irritated, often with rashes or little bumps? What about dry, flaky skin and excessive shedding? Skin problems are the most common complaint of dog owners, affecting about one in three animals at some time in their lives. Although there are many root causes, nutrition plays a key role. Some dogs develop sensitivities to ingredients in the food they eat, setting up an inflammatory response. Other dogs may be missing important fats and other vital nutrients that keep skin healthy. Making some changes in the diet and adding some key supplements can do wonders for problem skin.

1. **Try a different diet.** A dog's exposure to the same ingredients day after day can create food allergies, which is why many experts now advise rotating between foods with different meat and grain sources to prevent sensitivities from occurring. Common allergens are high gluten grains like corn and wheat, or even certain meats. Lamb, once considered "hypoallergenic", is really no more beneficial for skin problems than other proteins. A hidden cause of dog allergies may be storage mites (related to dust mites) that attack stored grains. Levels of mite feces are higher in "pet quality" grain sources, so stick to foods that use grains fit for human consumption.

Foods designed to relieve skin problems typically have a single meat source and either a single grain source or only low gluten grains. Try **California Natural Chicken & Rice, Wellness Fish & Sweet Potato, Pinnacle Trout and Sweet Potato**, or a similar simple food. Raw food diets, especially those with low grain content, can be very helpful. **Pepperdogz** and **Nature's Variety** have grain-free frozen diets in a variety of meats. Home preparing your dog's food is an option that gives you total control over ingredients, and you can experiment to find the combinations that best relieve your dog's symptoms.

2. **Use Digestive Enzymes.** This is the supplement that we swear by for itchy dogs. These enzymes are necessary for the breakdown and assimilation of nutrients in the gut that can prevent allergy symptoms. Although present in raw food, enzymes are destroyed by heat and processing. Adding digestive enzymes with every meal can bring about a dramatic improvement, often within ten days. We recommend **Enzymes Plus**, with important **trace minerals** and **Vitamin C**.
3. **Add Essential Fatty Acids.** EFA's are another key nutrient for skin and coat health. Not all fats are high in the important EFA's, which include linoleic acid, linolenic acid, and Omega 3's, and 6's. Some of the most concentrated sources are lecithin, flax oil, hemp oil, fish oils, borage oil, currant oil, and evening primrose oil. Besides calming itchiness, EFA's correct dry skin, flakiness, and excessive shedding, to beautify and nourish the coat. Our favorite skin and coat supplements are **Animal Essentials Essential Fatty Acids gel caps, California Natural Coat Supplement**, and **Grizzly Salmon Oil**.
4. **Control Your Dog's Fleas.** Dogs with underlying nutritional deficiencies will be more alluring to fleas, and will often develop fleabite allergies. Making the necessary food changes and adding enzymes and fatty acids to the diet will help to raise your dog's natural resistance to fleas, but in the meantime, it's important to reduce their numbers without resorting to potentially dangerous pesticides. (Please see our flea handout). Another way to repel fleas from the inside is by supplementing with nutritional sulfur, found in **BodyGuard**. Nutritional sulfur is also known for improving hair, nails, and skin.

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