



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, with a rash or little red bumps? Do you notice flaking skin or excessive shedding?

Skin problems will affect about one in three dogs at some time in their lives, and while there are many root causes, nutrition plays a key role. Some dogs develop sensitivities to ingredients in their food, setting up an inflammatory response that results in intense itching. Other dogs may be missing important fats or other nutrients in their diet that keep skin healthy. Making some changes to your dog's food and adding a few key supplements can work wonders.

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 overexposure. Common allergens are corn and wheat, or even common meats like beef or chicken. Lamb, once considered "hypoallergenic" because it was rarely used in dog food, is really no more beneficial for skin problems than other proteins. Trying a novel protein such as fish, pork, venison, duck or rabbit may do the trick.

A hidden cause of dog allergies may stem from mites infesting grain that has been stored too long. In the US, grain with unsafe levels of mite feces cannot be used for human food, but may be used in pet food, so stick to high end pet foods that claim only 'human quality' ingredients.

Dry foods designed to relieve skin problems typically have a single meat source and either a single grain source or a starchy vegetable substitute such as yams or potatoes. If grains are employed, oats, barley, millet or rice are the least likely to trigger a response. A non-extruded "alternative" dry food that you mix with water such as **The Honest Kitchen, Bravo Homestyle Complete** or **Sojos** can correct many problems.

For other dogs, canned, raw or lightly cooked food has resolved many a skin issue. Home preparing your dog's food gives you total control over ingredients, and you can experiment to find the combinations that best relieve your dog's symptoms. See our "Home-Prepared Diets" handout for more information.

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, OptaGest, Healthy Essentials Probiotic Spray** or **Animal Essentials**.

EFA's are another key nutrient for skin and coat health. Not all fats are high in the most important EFA's, which include linoleic acid, linolenic acid, and Omega 3s. 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 **Lifeline salmon oil, Nordic Naturals sardine oil, CocoTherapy coconut oil** and **Animal Essentials Ocean Omega fish oil capsules**.



Mollie gets her shine from EFAs

Dogs with underlying nutritional deficiencies will be more alluring to fleas and will often develop flea bite 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. Please see our flea handout for more information on this topic.