



## Skin Problems

Constant scratching, biting, and licking can drive both you and your pet crazy. You often lose sleep and you feel helpless knowing your pet is miserable. Some skin problems don't cause itchiness but rather hair loss and scabs. There can be a number of possible causes for your pet's misery. Discovering the cause is critical to treating it properly.



### Signs



Besides scratching, signs can include redness, flakiness, hair loss, and sores. With a long-standing problem, the skin can become thickened or blackened. Infections by bacteria, yeast, or both can develop in the irritated skin.

### Causes

Allergies are one of the more common causes of skin problems. Allergies can be due to either food or things in the environment (pollens or molds). Fleas will usually aggravate a problem or be the main cause. Ringworm (a fungal infection) and mites can also cause problems.

Some dogs have seborrhea, a disorder of the oil glands. This can cause excessive dryness or oiliness of the skin and be itchy. The excess oils cause a strong body odor even shortly after a bath.

Hormone problems, especially thyroid and adrenal, can cause skin disorders. Some autoimmune or other diseases, including cancer, can also cause problems with the skin.

### Testing

To determine the reason behind the problem requires testing. The skin can only do a limited number of things; so many different conditions can look similar.

Your pet can also have more than one problem at the same time.

The first thing usually done is to take samples of the skin (through scrapings and smears) to look for parasites and infections. Any infections must be cleared up to see what else is going on. Except for ringworm, a primary infection (meaning it's the main cause) is uncommon and it is usually a result of the skin not being healthy because of another condition. If ringworm is suspected, a fungal culture will be done.

Your pet is often treated for scabies (intense itchiness caused by a mite and contagious to people) and fleas even if those parasites are not seen. They are easy to treat and you don't always see them on an exam.

To check for food allergies, a hypoallergenic food trial will be recommended. Allergy blood tests can be done to check what environmental components may be causing allergies.

In some cases, a skin biopsy is advised, especially if it is a persistent problem or if it does not respond as expected. We will do blood tests for any suspected internal problems such as a hormone imbalance or autoimmune conditions.

### Treatment

Treatments will depend on what is causing the skin problems. Your pet will get medications for parasites and infections.

Shampoos will help to remove dust and pollen from your pet if allergies are a problem and help treat the skin. Shampooing is critical for controlling seborrhea.



Fish oil is anti-inflammatory and will reduce the inflammation in the skin as well as help the immune system. Antihistamines and steroids may be used to reduce the itchiness, but steroids can have serious side effects. There are newer medications to treat allergies.

Vitamins, digestive enzymes, and antioxidants along with a good quality diet, can also help. Treatment for any underlying disease will vary depending on the cause.

### **Summary**

When trying to control a chronic illness, patience is often needed. It is frustrating and agonizing to watch your pet suffer, but problems don't clear up overnight. Often different therapies have to be tried until you find what works best in your pet. Your pet may also need multiple tests to discover the underlying cause. However, a happy pet can be your reward if you keep trying.

