

Itching, skin infections and ear infections are common issues experienced by dogs. All of these can lead to your pet losing their hair and being uncomfortable. In dogs, the most common cause of these problems is either parasites (such as fleas, ticks, mange or lice) or allergies. Itchiness, skin infections and ear infections can be complicated and confusing to diagnose, but once the reason behind the allergy is determined, they can often be effectively managed.

## Parasites:

Products like Nexgard or Bravecto will clear most, if not all, common parasites through treatments given monthly or every 3 months. These products are always the first step in trying to treat your pet. You must treat your pet monthly for at least three months to break the life cycle of the flea. Otherwise, they will come back.

## Flea Allergies or Flea Allergy Dermatitis (FAD):

This is the most common allergy we see in dogs. In the case of flea allergies, your pet will have an extreme reaction to even a single flea bite. Even if you do not see fleas, your pet may be experiencing this allergy.

- Season: Often this allergy occurs in the summer, as fleas are present in the warmer months, but in San Diego fleas are present year-round.
- Treatment: Using a reliable flea product monthly for 3 months will break the cycle of the flea and keep this problem from recurring. Secondary skin and ear infections can occur and will have to be treated at the same time as you treat the flea problem. It is the secondary skin infection that leads to hair loss or scaly skin.

## Environmental Allergies or Atopy:

Environmental allergies are the second most common allergy in dogs. Environmental allergies typically do not start until 6 months or later. This means if your dog's problem is not caused by fleas, it is likely caused by something that they are allergic to in the environment. There are skin and blood tests that can give us insight as to what your pet is allergic to, but they are often not too useful because grasses, pollens, mites and spores are often unavoidable. These blood and skin tests should never be performed until a proper flea and food elimination trial has been performed.

- Season: Environmental allergies can be either seasonal, with spring and summer being the most common, or non-seasonal and occurring anytime in the year.
- Treatment: There are several long- and short-term solutions for environmental allergies depending on how they affect your pet. All of them require that ear infections and skin

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infections are treated successfully. Once your dog is comfortable the goal is to keep the allergies controlled enough to prevent itch and infections in the future. There are prescription medications that your veterinarian can discuss the pros and cons of and how they will affect your dog in the short term and long term.

Some over the counter medications that can help with mild allergies in dogs are:

- **Omega-3 fatty acids**, such as Bayer Tri-V snip tips. These must be given daily for 6 weeks to start working. This is prevention, not a short-term solution.
- **Antihistamines**, such as Benadryl and Zyrtec, can be given daily to help reduce redness in your dog's skin and itch. They do not always work well and will not work in the case of a moderate to severe allergy.
- **Topical shampoos**. Always bathe your dog with room temperature or cool water. Warm water may make them itchier. Over the counter products such as Douxo PS shampoo can help wash allergens off your dog, reduce skin irritation and even treat minor skin infections. Let the product sit on your dog's skin for 10 minutes before rinsing with cool water.
- **Other topical products**. Douxo PS also makes a mousse for spot treatment or wipes for skin folds. These products can be effective in controlling minor flare ups or for routine care.

## Food allergies.

Food allergies are responsible for only 15% of itching, skin or ear problems that we see in dogs, but can start in puppies as early as 3 months old. They can occur in dogs who eat the same food every day, but may become allergic to it over time.

- Season: Food allergies are typically year-round (not seasonal) and tend to recur after treatment.
- Treatment: A food trial is the only way to diagnose this disease. Food trials should be performed after eliminating flea allergies as a cause of your dogs' problems and should not be considered in dogs who only have symptoms in the summer months.
- Food trial: To perform a proper food trial, your dog will be on a special diet for 6 weeks (with no treats, human food, bones or medications with natural flavorings such as beef or chicken). The best, but most costly, diet to consider is a hydrolyzed diet. This prescription diet breaks down natural products into microscopic pieces that your dog will no longer recognize as allergens. Less expensive alternatives are limited-ingredient diets with a single protein source that your pet has not been exposed to, such as venison or salmon, and a carbohydrate source, such as rice.

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