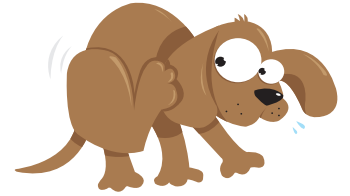




Skin Allergies

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Food and contact allergies can be very difficult to sort out and to pinpoint the exact cause.

Food Allergies

Food allergies can cause a generalised skin irritation with itching and coat thinning. This condition may be accompanied by loose motions and even inflamed ears. Determining the food source which does not agree with the dog can be very difficult. In the

majority of cases, the dogs are put on to a diet of cooked rice and chicken or fish. This is a very bland diet and the dog is kept on this for at least 3-6 weeks before adding anything else. The normal food sources are then added, one at a time, again for three to six weeks to see if there is any reaction in the skin.

The most common food allergies in the dog are to wheat gluten, followed by beef. A wheat and beef free diet may be needed. Once the offending food source(s) is isolated, normal feeding patterns can often be re-established merely by eliminating the offending source. There are low allergy prescription canned food and dry food diets available.

A point to remember about pet meat is that preservatives are often added, particularly in warmer weather, and many dogs will not tolerate these at all well, causing diarrhoea. Dry dog food manufacturers also use preservatives, many of which dogs will tolerate, but they can change these around every now and again. This may be the reason why dogs that may have been on one brand of dog food for a long period without any problems suddenly develop a reaction to a new batch of dry food.

'Many dogs can scratch on one brand of dry food, yet have no problem with another – this can be a reaction to the contents and/or the preservatives used.'

Contact Allergies

Contact allergies are easier to define as the dog will develop a reaction when it lies on the offending object. Many dogs are allergic to synthetic materials, and when lying on a new rug, may develop a rash along the belly and flanks. Removal of the offending article will almost immediately reduce the severity of the reaction and it should disappear within a few days.

Grass allergy is the most common contact allergy seen in the dog.

Symptoms - Affected areas are confined to the feet, sides of the mouth and occasionally around the eyes. Wet, fast growing grass is the main irritant as it has a very fine layer of salt on it, which dries on the dog's skin, causing irritation. As a result the dog starts to chew at its feet and/or drag itself along the grass trying to scratch itself. This causes more areas to be irritated and so on. The rubbing of the face in the grass causes the edges of the lips and the rims of the eyes to react. Specific types of grass such as Buffalo, can be more irritating than others.

Treatment - The way to control this type of allergy and irritation is to keep the dog off wet, fast growing grass. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Keeping a dog off wet grass after periods of heavy rainfall (most often spring time) can be nearly impossible. If the dog must venture out on to the grass, wipe its feet and face after it has been outside. Dogs that have white feet (pink skin pigmentation) are particularly prone to skin sensitivities. Keep lawns mown short and do not over water ie. let it look like hoary, old, dried out grass and the dog will appreciate it - even if the lawn does not look aesthetically pleasing to the human eye.

Specific treatments include antihistamines, preferably using the once a day antihistamines such as Clarintine*, Telfast* and Zyrtec*. Human antihistamines are very safe to use on these dogs. Some dogs may require short acting cortisones as well in the severe cases.

Long term control of this problem for a badly affected dog may require the establishment of a small concrete yard for outside exercise during sensitive times of the year.



White dogs and breeds that have white coats or large areas of pink skin (especially on the feet) are particularly sensitive to fleas and grass allergies.