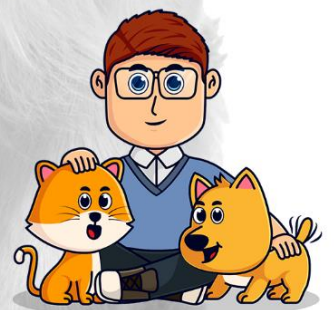


**DON'T LET ITCH
CONTROL
THEIR
LIFE**



**A DOG'S GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING
AND BEATING
ALLERGIES**

Dr. Alex Avery
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I've been a veterinarian in general practice for over 15 years, and I can tell you that allergies and itchy skin are up there as one of the most common (and frustrating) long-term health problems in dogs.

In fact, close to 20 percent of dogs will suffer from allergies in one form or another at some point in their life.

The most common manifestation of allergies in dogs is itchy skin. But don't make the mistake of thinking that this is a minor problem. Being itchy all the time is just like being in pain.

It results in constant, never-ending irritation and discomfort.

It results in poor sleep and an inability to rest.

Itchy dogs quickly become just plain miserable, depressed, and withdrawn.

The end result is a significant compromise to, and reduction in, an allergic dog's quality of life.

The good news is that this hugely common problem is very treatable, very manageable, and may even be able to be completely cured if the right action is taken.

Dr. Alex Avery

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Itching - It's Not Just Allergies

Despite the fact that allergies are the most common cause of long-term skin disease and itchiness in dogs, they are not the only cause. To understand the diagnostic process and successful treatment strategies, prevention, or even cure, it's really important to consider all the causes of itching and scratching in dogs.

We can break this down into five major groups:

1. Parasites
2. Infection
3. Anal gland disease
4. Other skin problems
5. Allergies

Parasites

The most common here is a flea infestation. Sometimes it will only take a couple of fleas to cause itchiness. To make matters worse, you don't always see adults, at least in the early stages of an infestation.

Checking for flea dirt is a really useful (and super simple) skill to learn.

Mites burrow into the skin. They can cause a lot of damage and inflammation within the skin and again can cause some really extreme itching and nasty skin lesions.



The most common mite is *Sarcoptes scabiei*, also known as the mange mite, which causes intense itching. *Demodex* is another mite that more often causes problems in younger dogs.

Lice are another potential, albeit less common, cause of itching in dogs. Lice live on the surface of the skin and in the hair. They bite to feed, causing itchiness in a similar way to fleas.

— Infection

Bacteria are the most common cause of infection, primarily caused by *Staphylococcal* species. These bacteria normally live on the skin without causing any problems, but under certain conditions (like those caused by allergy) can overgrow. The result of this is infection, inflammation, and irritation.

In some situations, such as hot spots in dense-coated dogs, the lesions can be very painful and progress with alarming rapidity.

Yeast, specifically *Malassezia pachydermatis*, is another normal skin organism that results in infection in the right (or wrong) skin environment. Taking advantage of poor skin health to explode in growth. Yeast infections are very common in dogs with an untreated allergy, resulting in characteristically greasy skin and a distinct smell in severe cases.

Ringworm is a fungal infection of the hair follicles primarily, which often looks like flaking and crusting of the skin, although it can look like any other form of skin disease. Dogs don't get the classic circular rings on their skin that people experience.

In the early stages, this infection is actually not an itchy problem. But as the ringworm infection progresses, infections with other microbes develop, resulting in inflammation and itching.



— Anal Gland Disease

Anal gland disease, or anal gland impaction, often causes dogs to be very itchy. Classically, dogs will scoot or rub their bum along the ground as a marker of anal gland problems, although this can also be the result of intestinal worms.

Dogs with impacted anal glands will also frequently chew and nibble around their back end. This could be their groin, their thighs, or the top of their tail base. Anywhere remotely close to the problem area that they can actually reach.

— Other Skin Disease

There is a whole range of miscellaneous skin problems that can also result in itchiness, either directly or because they make an infection more likely.

These include dry and flaky skin, greasy skin, hormone problems (such as an underactive thyroid), and abnormalities within the skin itself (of which there is a huge number, such as Schnauzer Comedo Syndrome).

Certain autoimmune diseases, where the body's own immune system attacks itself, can cause a variety of skin lesions to appear. These too can become infected and may be inherently itchy.

Even tumors, such as cutaneous lymphoma or mast cell tumors, do not always look like a single solitary lump, but can instead appear and act in a very similar manner to a lot of other forms of skin disease.



— Allergies

And then our final category of disease that causes itchiness in dogs is allergies.

We can further break allergies into three main groups.

- **Flea allergic dermatitis** - an allergy to the saliva of fleas where, in some dogs, a single flea bite is all it takes to cause extreme itchiness, inflammation, and more generalized skin disease.
- **Environmental allergies (known as atopic dermatitis)** - think of this as being very similar to hay fever in people, but rather than causing runny noses and sneezing, the environmental allergies cause inflamed and itchy skin.
- **Food allergy** - an allergy to a particular protein or carbohydrate in an individual's diet that results in itchy skin, rather than diarrhea.

The important thing to note is that, while each allergy type may behave slightly differently, for the most part, they can appear identical





Making The Diagnosis of Allergies

With so many varied causes of skin disease and itchiness in dogs, it is vital that an accurate and reliable diagnosis is made for your dog's specific problem.

While allergies and allergic skin disease are by far and away the most common causes of long-term itch and skin disease in dogs, they are not the only causes.

Failing to identify any other problem that could be the primary cause or contributor to your dog's skin disease has the potential to seriously impact their health and well-being.

Jumping to conclusions or using inaccurate testing methods may compromise your dog's well-being and quality of life by:

- Resulting in a delay in providing the most effective treatment for their condition.
- Allowing irreversible changes within the skin to develop that result in ongoing problems for your dog (this is very common with poorly controlled ear disease).
- In the extreme, result in the progression of non-allergic disease (such as cancers) that may otherwise have been easily treated if diagnosed in the early stages when they were first noticed.



Financial Toxicity

Making the wrong diagnosis could also result in a condition I call financial toxicity.

This is where the health and well-being of your dog may not be significantly compromised, but by wasting finances on less than optimal (or even worthless) testing, interventions, supplements, and innumerable other products, a significant amount of money is used.

The impact of this can then become apparent when this course of action fails to work as effectively as you would have liked or expected. Or it fails to work at all.

The subsequent, more appropriate course of proper testing or effective treatment may actually then be found to be unaffordable where, had this been the first course of action, it would have been within reach.

In effect, the substandard (or just plain wrong) action then prevents your dog from receiving the care they actually need and deserve.

And even if this isn't the case, who wants to waste good money on inaccurate tests or useless treatments?

You might think this far-fetched, but is a reality I come across all too regularly both online and in the vet clinic.



— A Diagnosis You Can Trust

We need to make a good diagnosis. And this means an accurate diagnosis that is reached through the use of **reliable** and **proven** diagnostic techniques.

This can include:

- Skin scraping for parasites
- Cytology (looking at samples using a microscope) and culture for infections
- Blood testing for hormonal problems
- Skin biopsies of any concerning lumps, bumps, or strange scabby areas.
- Diet trials, blood testing, and intradermal skin testing for allergies.

The specific test(s) most suitable for your individual dog will vary depending on their history, presentation, and clinical exam.

It is seldom possible to reach an accurate diagnosis, especially in a longer-term skin condition, without running any tests, although thankfully, few dogs will need every test listed.



— DIY Allergy Tests

When it comes to the diagnosis of allergic skin disease in dogs, unfortunately, home testing kits have time and again been shown to be a complete waste of both time and money.

A clear example of this is when sterile water and man-made fibers from stuffed toys have been submitted, they both resulted in the diagnosis of severe allergies to a whole range of different substances.

Clearly neither sterile water nor polyester can suffer from allergic disease!

What this does though, is highlight the fact that many pet-parent targeted products rely on a slick marketing team (often combined with a significant Facebook ad budget) as opposed to actual scientific evidence of accuracy or benefit.

Something we should all want before parting with our hard-earned money.





An Integrative, Holistic Approach

Once a diagnosis of allergies has been accurately made in a dog, there is no one-size-fits-all approach or single cure-all that can be used to stop your dog from itching and control their disease long-term.

Instead, a holistic approach needs to be taken, using all of the treatment options at our disposal.

The first part of this is pharmaceutical intervention to control and settle your dog's itch and skin inflammation in the first stages to provide that instant relief.

And I know that for many, the use of pharmaceuticals is opposite to their definition of the word holistic, and to be avoided at all costs. And for dogs who are only relatively mildly affected, it may well be that pharmaceutical drugs can be completely avoided.

But you wouldn't withhold painkillers if your dog was in significant pain, right? And it's just the same with our itchy dogs.

Pharmaceuticals can play a really important role in early intervention to provide immediate relief while our other treatment strategies are kicking in, which often take at least several weeks (and sometimes several months) to start working.



Equally, in the presence of deeper infections or parasite infestations, pharmaceutical medications are vital for their successful elimination.

And then by implementing meaningful changes in all of the following areas, we can reduce or completely eliminate our reliance on or need for these pharmaceuticals on a long-term or repeat basis.

These areas include:

- Diet
- Shampoos and grooming
- Topical treatments
- Supplements
- Environmental control
- Whole-body health

— Diet

Dietary management is incredibly powerful in a dog suffering from any form of allergic skin disease.

This may involve complete diet changes. And in some cases, for example, with food allergies, a change in diet may be all that is needed to cure your dog's allergic skin disease.

— Grooming

The use of shampoos and other grooming strategies have been proven to soothe and settle inflammation and reduce itch in allergic pets. They can even eliminate an infection.

Using the wrong products or the wrong techniques, however, has the potential to actually make the situation worse.



— Topical Treatments

Other topical treatments can be equally powerful, and in many cases can replace the need for systemic pharmaceutical intervention.

Again though, some products can cause more harm than good (even if this is just a delay in starting a treatment that is actually going to work).

— Supplements

Dietary supplements for allergic skin disease are often one of the first treatment modalities that we reach for.

And while some supplements can be incredibly valuable, there are many that promise the earth when in reality they deliver very little, if any, benefit.

The regulation of the supplement industry is also virtually non-existent. Further adding to the difficulty in choosing the right supplement that will actually benefit your dog's health.

— Environmental Modification

Controlling, changing, and monitoring your dog's environment is hugely important in reducing their exposure to allergic stimuli, keeping their skin settled, and ensuring good control of their disease.

— Small Changes Add Up

Making even small changes in each of these categories can add up to making a significant difference that really helps to control or even eliminate your pet's allergies.

Improving their quality of life and transforming their health.

In the same way, ignoring one or more categories, or relying on a single treatment modality, is a surefire way to ensure that your dog's management plan is suboptimal.





Next Steps

You can find my free resource library over at the [Our Pet's Health Academy](#) ✨ including these relevant downloads:

- **Cognitive Bias and Jedi Mind Tricks**
How to recognize the most common ways bad information can seem good
- **The Fear Free Vet Visit Checklist**
Your dog doesn't have to hate their veterinarian
- **The Healthy Dog Checklist**
How to avoid the most common preventable diseases and injuries I see every day at the vet hospital

If you're looking for products that are proven to help resolve the signs of allergy, and stop them coming back, you can [find my recommended products here.](#) ✨

And finally, strap yourself in for the journey of discovery that is [The Dog Allergy Summit!](#) ✨ I've brought together a team of experts from across the globe to dive deep into the action steps every pet parent with an allergic dog can take to help their dog live the happy, comfortable life they deserve.

Because they're family!

