

allergies

and

Coconut Oil

By Charisa Antigua

My Yorkie Violet began to show serious signs of allergies before she was a year old. She scratched incessantly and would bite her sides and under her arms until she bled. She was miserable and I was horrified. What did I do wrong? What was making Violet so itchy?

Treating and managing allergies in our dogs can be a challenging and frustrating experience. Determining the cause and trying to manage it takes time, dedication, and a good understanding of allergies and what causes them.

Allergies in a Nutshell

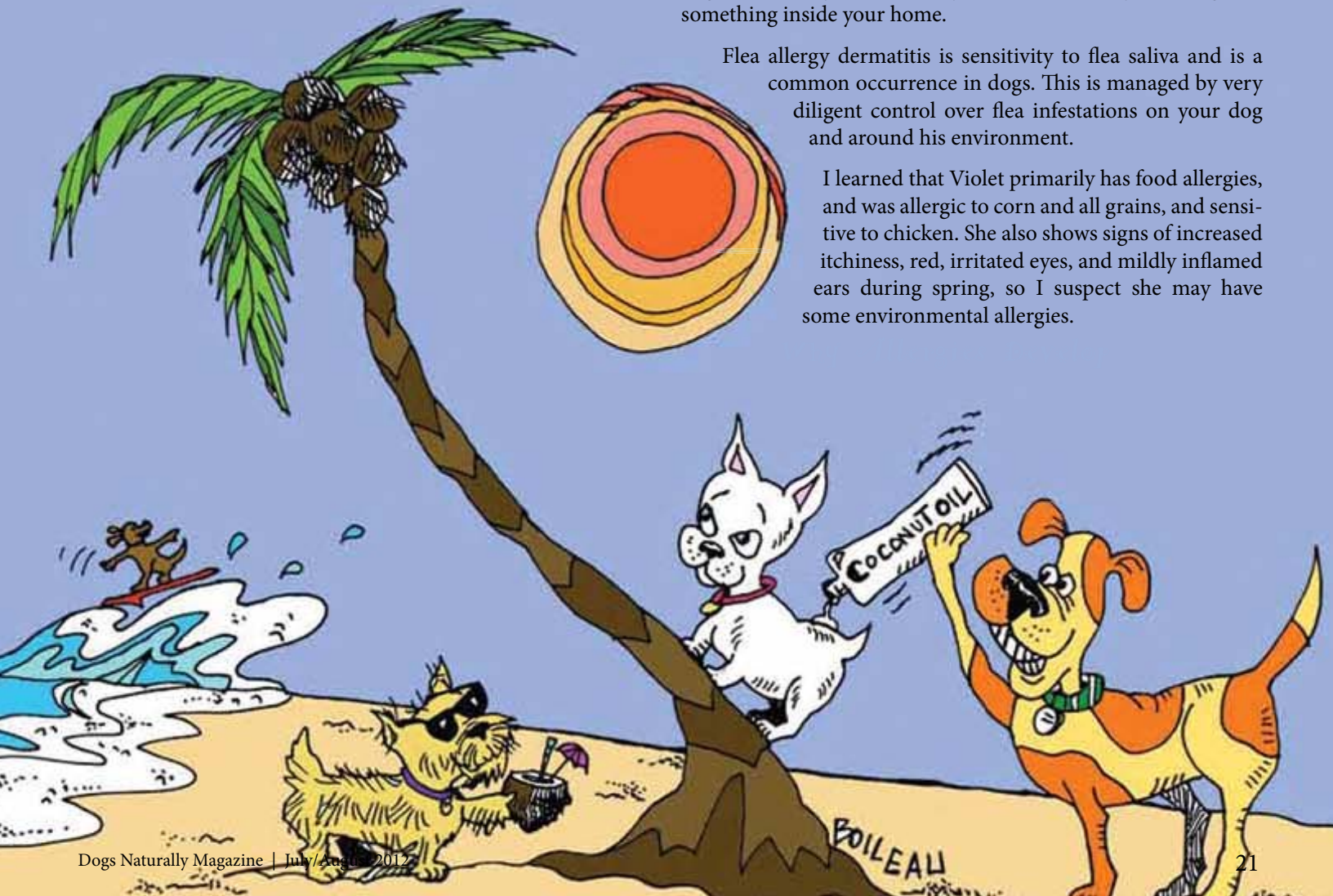
Allergies are classified into three main categories: food allergies, environmental allergies, and flea allergy dermatitis. Your dog

may have one type of allergy, or a combination of two or more. With food allergies, the dog develops sensitivity to a food ingredient, usually a protein or carbohydrate. This usually occurs when the dog has consumed the ingredient for a long period of time and his immune system begins to overreact to the food. Food allergies may manifest themselves by chronic or intermittent gastrointestinal disorders such as vomiting, diarrhea, gas, and even skin problems.

If your dog has environmental allergies, he may be allergic to a countless variety of outdoor allergens such as grasses, pollens, ragweed, or indoor irritants like dust mites, mold, or chemicals around your home. Generally, if your dog exhibits allergic symptoms during changing seasons, he may be allergic to outdoor allergens. If his symptoms are year round, he may be allergic to something inside your home.

Flea allergy dermatitis is sensitivity to flea saliva and is a common occurrence in dogs. This is managed by very diligent control over flea infestations on your dog and around his environment.

I learned that Violet primarily has food allergies, and was allergic to corn and all grains, and sensitive to chicken. She also shows signs of increased itchiness, red, irritated eyes, and mildly inflamed ears during spring, so I suspect she may have some environmental allergies.



Coconut Oil For Allergies

Over time, I worked closely with a wonderful holistic vet to manage Violet's allergies. I feed Violet a raw, species appropriate, grain free, single protein diet and rotate through three or four protein sources over a three month period. I bathe her once a week with a gentle antibacterial shampoo. I got rid of all chemicals in our home and switched to nontoxic, natural cleaning products. I titer Violet instead of automatically vaccinating her. I do everything by the proverbial allergy handbook in a constant effort to keep her allergies under control. But Violet will always be my sensitive, slightly pink skinned, delicate Yorkie, waiting for the next allergen to taunt her system.

Then I look at Violet's half sister, Camille. Her skin is perfectly smooth and white, without a single blemish. Her coat is silky and shiny, and her ears are always clear. She hardly ever scratches. I feed her the same food as Violet, and treat her the same way (except maybe bathe her every other week, on the weeks when I'm too tired to bathe two long haired Yorkies). Camille can eat any dog biscuit, even those with corn and wheat, and she will still be able to handle them without issues.

What is so different about Violet and Camille? Why does Violet seem so genetically inferior and Camille so "perfect"? This is where the luck of the draw comes in: genetics and your pet's immune system.

Allergies develop because your dog's immune system is out of balance. Genetics play a big role in how your dog's immune system functions. An allergic response occurs when your dog's immune system is overactive and overreacts to an allergen to which it is exposed. An overactive immune system responds aggressively to these allergens, and sometimes even to the dog's own bacteria residing on his skin. When your pet's body begins to view substances in his diet or in the environment as a threat, his immune system responds inappropriately and mounts an attack on these food related or environmental elements.

Aside from addressing environmental and external factors in your allergic dog's life, you also need to address his immune system. In the case of allergies, you need to balance a dog's immune system, not strengthen it.

If you're into natural health care, you've probably heard about the benefits of coconut oil. In terms of allergy management, coconut oil is an extremely valuable food to add to your pet's allergy treatment plan. I've always known about the benefits of coconut oil. As a child, my grandmother made us take it orally for every ailment, and she would slather it on our every cut, wound, insect bite, or burn. I didn't know then why coconut oil helped in so many ways, but I know why now. Most of coconut oil's benefits apply to animals as well.

Coconut Oil For Allergies

Coconut oil is perhaps the most perfect food for managing allergies and for supporting the skin, coat and gastrointestinal tract. Virgin coconut oil is the richest natural source of medium chain fatty acids (MCFAs). Most of coconut oil's health benefits come from medium chain fatty acids, namely caprylic (C8:0), capric (C10:0) and lauric (C12:0) acids. The most abundant medium chain fatty acid (MCFAs) found in coconut oil is lauric acid, which is considered to be responsible for many of coconut oil's health benefits. Coconut oil is about 50% lauric acid, and the only other abundant source found in nature is breast milk.

When Violet had her first severe allergic reaction, I took her to a dermatologist vet who promptly put her on prednisone. This worked in the beginning, because prednisone suppressed Violet's overactive immune system and addressed her visible symptoms. However, it did not address the root of her allergic reactions, which was her out of balance immune system.

After seeing a holistic vet, we weaned Violet off prednisone, addressed her food and environmental issues and put her on a holistic regimen with natural supplements and coconut oil. Within three months, Violet was off prednisone and she has been off it for five years now.

Why is coconut oil so effective in for managing allergies? Human breast milk and milk from other mammals all contain MCFAs. MCFAs protect infants from infection while the immune system is still developing, thereby supporting the immune system. It nourishes and protects the body from harmful microbes. When the body metabolizes the most predominant MCFAs, lauric acid, it is converted by the body to monoglyceride monolaurin. Monoglyceride helps support healthy cellular function and protect it from infection.

Let's take a closer look at how coconut oil may help your allergic pet:

Helps against bacterial infections and inflammation

Laboratory studies have shown coconut oil to be a natural antibacterial, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory agent. Since ancient Ayurvedic times, healers have successfully used coconut oil as an antiseptic, astringent, gargle for sore throats, ear infections and even stomach aches. Dr. Jon Kabara, PhD and chemist discovered the antiseptic action of coconut monoglycerides in the 1960s. He found that when taken internally and applied topically, lauric acid and monolaurin stopped the growth of bacteria. Laboratory studies have shown that monoglyceride monolaurin has broad spectrum antiseptic action against bacteria, viruses and fungal organisms and protects against inflammation. Allergic responses to foods or environmental allergens cause inflammation throughout your pet's body and the skin, eyes, ears, and

gastrointestinal systems can be affected. I give Violet coconut oil orally as a prophylactic antiseptic to prevent skin infection and inflammation throughout her body.

Applied topically, coconut oil is also highly effective in reducing inflammation. When applied on insect bites, scratches, cuts or wounds, I've found that coconut oil heals the skin quickly. According to Dr. Bruce Fife, CN ND, mammals utilize the antimicrobial properties of MCFAs to protect themselves against infection. When animals lick themselves, their salivary enzymes convert body oils into protective free MCFAs which help fight infection. He further notes that natural bacteria on the skin break down the medium chain triglycerides into acidic free fatty acids, increasing the number of antimicrobial fatty acids on the skin, which contributes to an acidic environment in the skin, thereby protecting it from infection. MCFAs in coconut oil help to restore damaged skin by penetrating cell structures in connective tissues.

Helps against yeast and fungal infections

Caprylic acid, another MCFA found in coconut oil has been shown to effectively kill yeast, candida and other forms of fungus. It will kill candida and other fungi in the intestinal tract while supporting a healthy intestinal environment. Applied topically and given orally, coconut oil can be very effective in helping the body fight yeast and fungal overgrowth. Yeast and fungal infections often occur in allergic dogs. Dogs can develop an allergy to the naturally occurring yeast in their body. Yeast and fungal infection may be exhibited by ear infections and smelly yeasty paws, and can occur in any moist areas of your dog's body. Because Violet's immune system does not function properly, I've noticed that she has seasonal issues with smelly ears or itchy paws. When her ears begin to smell musty, I diligently clean her ears with a Q-tip and a very small amount of coconut oil. I've found that this prevents any ear inflammation or infection from progressing further.

Helps support healthy gastrointestinal system

Allergies, particularly food allergies, can result in gastrointestinal problems such as diarrhea, vomiting, gas and even anal gland issues. MCFAs in coconut oil are easily digested and improve vitamin and mineral absorption. When consumed orally, coconut oil functions as an effective internal antimicrobial substance. Lauric acid/monoglyceride is absorbed through the intestinal wall, keeping the gut bacteria in a healthy balance.

The anti-inflammatory effects of coconut oil help soothe and heal inflammation and injury in the digestive tract. In a double blind clinical study, diets enriched with medium chain triglycerides were shown to significantly improve chemically induced colitis in rats. The severity of colitis was evaluated pathologically, and tissue myeloperoxidase activity was measured in colonic tis-

sues. The study showed that diets enriched with MCTs may be effective for the therapy of inflammatory bowel disease.

I should also mention that coconut dietary fiber, such as dehydrated defatted coconut flakes, is an excellent supplement for digestive issues and fiber responsive diseases. Also rich in MCFAs, coconut flakes have one of the highest percentages of fiber among all plant foods. When adequate amounts of fiber are consumed, friendly intestinal bacteria flourish. The friendly bacteria produce short chain fatty acids (SCFAs). These SCFAs kill off many forms of harmful bacteria and yeasts, including candida. SCFAs are an important source of nutrition in the colon and are the preferred food of colonic cells as they are able to pass through cell membranes and into the mitochondria without the aid of special hormones or enzymes. Coconut dietary fiber helps to increase SCFA in the gut and helps prevent and relieve symptoms associated with irritable bowel syndrome, colitis, and other digestive disorders. In addition, the anti-inflammatory effects of MCFA found in coconut chips can help soothe the digestive tract.

Helps balance the immune system

The primary goal in managing Violet's allergies is to balance her immune system. Reducing stress on the immune system allows it to rest and regain its balance. Coconut oil supports the immune system by ridding the body of harmful microorganisms, relieving stress on the body and on the immune system. Without harmful organisms taxing the body, the immune system functions more effectively.

In order to receive the full health benefits of coconut oil, be sure that the coconut oil you use is not from genetically modified (GMO) coconuts. Seek out USDA certified organic, virgin (meaning unrefined), hexane free, raw and cold pressed products. We also prefer coconut oil in glass jars, as the oils in plastic containers can swell polyethylene, which can leak into the oil.

When treating your dog for allergies, I recommend that you work with your vet to develop a holistic treatment plan. Treating and managing allergies is a lifelong commitment. Coconut oil should be included as part of a complete supportive treatment plan for dogs with allergies and unbalanced immune systems. 🌿

Charisa Antigua is the CEO and cofounder of CocoTherapy. Charisa and her twin sister, Carmina O'Connor, work passionately to educate pet lovers about the benefits of coconuts for animals. Charisa is owned by two Yorkies, Violet and Camille, and a 22 lb. coconut-addicted Ragdoll cat, Montecore. You can visit Charisa at www.cocotherapy.com and www.oscarnewman.com