

Guess what the most common reason for pets walking through a vet's door is? That's right, skin problems. Here's what you need to know about your pet's itch before that visit... or maybe we can even head that visit off at the pass for you. Here we go.

Why Is My Dog Itching? Here's a summary of causes for you. Learn more below.

- Fleas and Flea Allergies
- Environmental Allergies
- Dietary Allergies
- Atopy
- Skin Infections
- Dry Skin

What Can I Do At Home to Help My Dog's Itch?

- Antihistamines like Zyrtec (1 mg per 2 lbs body weight given once daily) or Benadryl (1 mg per lb given twice daily) will help 30-40% of dogs
- [LONGEVITY PLUS](#) can help you reduce your pet's itch... naturally.
- Gentle shampoos (aloe/oatmeal are great) in lukewarm, but not hot, water rinses. Make SURE you get all the suds off your pet, or else!!
- Topical meds like cortisone or NeoSporin ointments on irritated areas,
- Elizabethan collars to both distract your pet and prevent them from making things worse by chewing.
- Bandage a hind paw, if needed, to distract your pet and prevent them from making things worse by scratching.

What Can My Vet Do to Help My Dog's Itch? Heck, your vet can **SOLVE** this for you!!

- An exam and tests to figure out exactly why your pet is itching
- Allergy testing and desensitization
- Effective flea and tick prevention
- Beginning aggressive treatment right away -- injections and bathing
- Antibiotics to control skin infections, whether a primary issue or due to your pet's chewing.
- Medications to reduce your pet's itch:

-Prednisone is the old kid on the block, cheap and very effective but comes with some side effects.

-[Apoquel](#) is a very potent immune suppressant that can solve your pet's itch within a day or two.

-[Cyttopoint](#) injections are game-changers for dogs with atopy, and help some dogs with allergies as well.

More details on the causes of your pet's itch, from above:

1) FLEAS

- Probably the single most common reason for pets' itch nationwide
- If your pet is chewing over the tail, it's fleas (or flea allergies)
- Flea allergies actually mean that your pet is allergic to the flea's saliva. Flea allergies can be very frustrating to treat because just ONE flea bite can cause months of itching.
- Sadly, "natural" flea preventives do NOT work for your pet. You need the good stuff, and your vet can help you choose.
- Remember that for every flea found on your pet there are 100 in their environment, both inside your house and outside.
- Fleas hang out in shade and humidity, like grass or carpet. They don't like smooth surfaces like tile, hardwood, or concrete.

2) ENVIRONMENTAL ALLERGIES

- Your pet can be allergic to many things in their environment, both inside and out. I have seen pets allergic to detergents and carpet cleaners, so beware.
- If their itch is seasonal, usually it is due to a plant or pollen allergy.
- If it's an outside allergen, you can minimize it by wiping your pet down with a wet towel after they go outside.
- Your vet can diagnose environmental allergies with [blood tests](#), and hyposensitization works about 60-70% of the time.

3) DIETARY ALLERGIES

- Your pet may be allergic to their food or a treat that you are giving them, or anything else that they are putting into their mouth. True story, I once diagnosed a cat with allergies to.... gophers.
- In GENERAL, dietary allergies cause itchy face/ears and trunk.
- The best way to diagnose these is with food trials, but it can take up to 2 months before you start to see improvement
- Your vet has prescription diets for these pets, or you can cook for your pet at home.
- The most common dietary allergen is red meat, followed by poultry. Fish is a great choice, but some pets need special diets comprised of alligator or kangaroo !!

4) ATOPY

- Atopy is a genetic disease that results in a defective skin barrier, so that things that normally don't penetrate the skin now do in atopic dogs. This exposes their immune system to ALL sorts of challenges, and a lot of itch.
- Cytopoint injections are GAME-CHANGERS for dogs with atopy, but don't work for "regular allergies".
- Topical medications from your vet can help improve the skin barrier for your pet with atopy.

5) SKIN INFECTIONS

- Signs of a skin infection are redness, pus, and smell.
- Skin infections can be a stand-alone problem causing itch, but EVERY OTHER CAUSE OF ITCH WILL EVENTUALLY CAUSE A SKIN INFECTION AS YOUR PET BITES AND CHEWS AT THEMSELVES.
- You can minimize chewing with an E-collar and minimize scratching by bandaging a hind foot.
- Your vet can help you choose the best antibiotics and anti-bacterial shampoos.
- For chronic infections, your vet may have to do a culture and sensitivity test to learn what bugs are present and how best to kill them.

6) DRY SKIN

- Dry skin can be caused by diet or by a pet's environment.
- Omega 3 fatty acids will solve this
- Moisturizing shampoos can also be a big help.

If you have questions about your pet's itch, I am happy to help you. Simple questions are easy, and if life becomes complicated I'd love to work with you on a [Concierge Consult](#) basis. Thanks for reading, Dr. Kevin