

## Is Your Pet's Skin Itching Like Crazy? Could Be One of These

Winter can be especially hard on your pet's skin. But, you can retain good skin quality even in the dry winter months. First of all, figure out which of these 4 culprits is the root cause of the problem. And treat them to a TLC massage with this natural immune builder.

**Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cold weather and indoor heating can contribute to dry, flaky skin in pets
- Flaky skin in dogs and cats is often caused by lack of grooming or bathing, a dietary deficiency, or an underlying medical disorder
- The goal should be to keep your pet's skin and coat in good condition year-round to avoid cold weather dryness and flaking

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Just as cold weather and indoor heating tend to make human hair and skin feel excessively dry, they can have the same effect on your pet's skin and coat as well. Fortunately, there are things you can do to maintain your pet's coat in good condition even during winter months. Typically, your pet's flaky skin and dry coat are due to one or more factors, including:

- He's not being groomed often enough
- She's not being bathed often enough, or (rarely) she's getting too many baths
- There's a deficiency in his diet
- She has an underlying medical disorder

If your pet's coat is in poor condition due to one or more of these causes, winter's cold temperatures and low humidity will exacerbate the problem. The goal should be to maintain your pet's skin and coat in optimum condition year-round to help prevent seasonal problems.

### Grooming Your Pet's Coat Gets Rid of Dead Skin and Hair

If your pet's coat isn't regularly groomed (brushed in the case of dogs, self-groomed in the case of most cats), dead flaky skin tends to accumulate. This is especially a problem for dogs with double coats, because the thick long undercoat can collect and hide lots of dead skin.

Most kitties do a pretty good job grooming away their dead skin and excess hair, but long-haired cats, those that are overweight, and elderly kitties often can't do a thorough job.

If your cat seems to have a lot of flaking in a particular spot, watch to see if she's able to groom in that area. If she isn't, you'll need to brush her regularly to facilitate removal of dead skin and loose hair.

## **Here's How to Find Out If Your Pet Needs a Bath**

Too many or too few baths can cause excessively flaky skin in your pet. A good rule of thumb is that your dog or cat should be bathed "as often as he needs it." Some dogs rarely need a bath, while others with oily or flaky skin and hair should be bathed at least weekly. The condition of your pet's skin and coat should dictate how often he gets a bath.

Some cats, long-haired kitties in particular, also occasionally need baths. A greasy or sticky-feeling coat is a sign your cat needs a bath. When an overweight kitty can't properly groom the back half of his body, baths are often necessary for sanitary purposes and to keep the skin healthy and free of infection.

If you live in a dry climate, your pet may need fewer baths than dogs or cats living in areas with higher humidity. As a general rule, the more humid the climate, the more skin irritation we see in pets, and the more often they need to be bathed.

Select a gentle, organic shampoo specifically designed for dogs or cats. You might also want to follow up with an all-natural, species-specific conditioner to moisturize and condition your pet's skin and coat.

## **Is Your Pet's Diet Deficient in Essential Omega-3 Fats?**

Lack of sufficient omega-3 fatty acids in the diet is a common cause of excessively flaky skin in pets. Dogs and cats need an abundance of omega-3s to be healthy "from the inside out."

Most commercial pet food is manufactured at extremely high temperatures, and since omega-3 fatty acids are very sensitive to heat and light, they are inert by the time they are packaged.

Even if you feed your pet homemade raw meals, if you're not following a balanced recipe that calls for extra essential fatty acids (omega-3s), your dog's or cat's diet is probably unbalanced for fatty acids. In my experience, dietary deficiency of omega-3s is the number one cause of excessively flaky skin in pets.

Whether you feed a commercial or homemade diet, you may need to supplement with essential fatty acids. My favorite is krill oil, but I also see good improvement in flaky coats when coconut oil is supplemented.

Not only are omega-3s important for your dog or cat, so is the dietary ratio of omega-3s to omega-6s. Most pet foods, whether commercial or homemade, are rich in omega-6 fatty acids.

Because the average pet diet is heavy in omega-6s, supplementing with additional omega-6s in the form of corn oil, olive oil, safflower oil, or even flax oil (which contains some vegetable sources of omega 3s, but also omega 6s) can create an imbalance serious enough to cause skin problems.

It's also important to note that dogs and cats can't convert omega-3 vegetable sources into DHA. Flax oil has some omega-3 value for humans, but that doesn't hold true for your pet. So it's really important that you supply fish-body oils or krill oil to your dog or cat. Algal DHA is also a good source of omega-3 fatty acids.

## Coconut Oil Skin Treatments

Coconut oil treatments can be very helpful in improving the integrity of flaking skin. They also support the lipid barrier, which makes your pet's skin healthier and more resistant to pathogens like yeast and opportunistic bacteria.

This treatment can be used with both short- and long-haired dogs, but it will obviously be more challenging with a long-haired pet. It's important to do coconut oil treatments on clean skin, so bathe your pet first and dry her thoroughly. I recommend using 100 percent organic, cold-pressed, and human grade coconut oil.

Apply the coconut oil to your pet's body like a mask. It will not only help keep her skin soft, but will also improve the natural defenses of the skin. Coconut oil contains lauric acid, which supports the immune system whether taken orally or used topically. Watch me do a coconut oil treatment on one of my own dogs in this [video](#).

## Ruling Out an Underlying Medical Issue

Another reason for excessive flaking in pets is an underlying medical problem. Cats and dogs can have metabolic conditions that inhibit the skin's turnover rate. Thyroid conditions are a common cause of flaky skin, including hypothyroidism in dogs and hyperthyroidism in kitties.

Any health issue in a cat that causes her not to feel well can translate to a lack of regular or thorough grooming. Lots of ill kitties have excessive flaking.

Skin infections are another very common medical cause of flaking. Bacterial infections, fungal infections like ringworm, and parasitic infections on the skin can all cause increased flaking in your pet.

If your canine or feline companion is having a flaky skin problem, work with your veterinarian to identify the root cause so you can resolve the issue and get your pet's skin and coat back to a healthy condition.

## Sources and References

[The Bark](#)

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