

Why Your Dog's Allergies Are Worse Than Yours

While humans grapple with sneezes and sniffles, our canine counterparts face a more daunting foe with each changing season. Delve into the hidden world of dog allergies, far more complex and perilous than human ailments, and discover cutting-edge strategies to alleviate their silent suffering.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Spring is almost here, which means many dogs are about to start itching, scratching, and feeling generally miserable thanks to seasonal environmental allergies such as grass allergies
- Grass and other environmental allergies in dogs almost always involve the skin rather than the eyes and respiratory tract; affected animals are typically very itchy, and the itch-scratch-chew cycle can result in irritated, inflamed skin, hot spots, and secondary infections
- There are several things you can do starting today to relieve your dog's seasonal discomfort, including addressing her diet, treating dysbiosis if necessary, and supplementing with essential fatty acids
- It's also important to effectively control indoor allergens in your home, and give your dog regular foot soaks, baths, and eye rinses
- Talk to your integrative veterinarian about natural antihistamines, and if necessary, consider a desensitization protocol ideally initiated before the start of allergy season

Spring is on the way, which means warm, sunny days — but also allergies for lots of human and canine family members. Grass allergies, which are inhalant or contact allergies caused by pollens produced by grasses, can be a trigger for sensitive dogs. The allergens are absorbed by the skin and mucus membranes. They're airborne, which means your dog doesn't even have to be on walking, playing, or lying on grass to have a reaction.

Grass or seasonal allergies typically strike in the spring and fall, but they can become a year-round problem for some dogs. Sensitivity can develop at any age, but most dogs don't show symptoms until they've been repeatedly exposed.

4 Classic Seasonal Allergy Symptoms in Dogs

1. **Intense itchiness** — Dogs and cats with allergies are usually very itchy. They scratch at themselves and may show signs of irritability. Some might bite or chew at a specific area of the body, while others are itchy from nose to tail. You may catch your pet rubbing his body against your furniture or along the carpet to help relieve that awful itch.
2. **Hair loss and skin issues** — As the itch-scratch cycle worsens, the skin becomes inflamed and tender, which can set the stage for secondary infections. There might also be areas of hair loss and oozing or crusty sores, including **hot spots** — areas of inflamed, infected skin resulting from an overgrowth of normal skin bacteria.

3. **Problems with the ears and feet** — Pets with seasonal allergies typically have issues with their ears and feet. The ear canals grow itchy and inflamed, and they often become infected with yeast or bacteria. Symptoms of an ear infection include scratching at the ears, head shaking, hair loss around the ears, and a bad smell or discharge coming from the ears.

Because dogs sweat from the pads of their feet, when they go outside, allergens cling to their paws. Those allergens get tracked back inside and all around your home, especially in areas where your pet hangs out, and are a major source of itchiness.

Allergic pets often lick or chew at their paws and toes. The excessive licking and chewing can spark a secondary yeast infection, so if your pet's feet start smelling musty, or like cheese popcorn or corn chips, chances are she's developed a yeast infection.

4. **Respiratory symptoms** — Although it's uncommon, some dogs can develop symptoms like those of an allergic human, such as a runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing, and coughing.

Diagnosing Grass Allergies in Dogs

Your veterinarian will ask you for your dog's symptom history, including duration, severity, seasonality, and any treatments he's received. Next, she'll thoroughly examine your dog's haircoat and skin, noting any hair loss, rashes, lesions, or damage to the skin resulting from scratching or chewing to relieve itchiness.

The "gold standard" of allergy testing and the test that provides the most accurate result is called an Intradermal Skin Test performed by a veterinary dermatologist while your dog is mildly sedated. One side of the abdomen is shaved, and specific allergens are injected.

The area is monitored for the presence of hives, indicating an allergic reaction to the specific allergen injected in that location. If allergens are identified, treatment is designed specifically for the individual pet.

Allergic reactions are produced by your pet's immune system, and the way her immune system functions is a result of both nature (genetics) and nurture (environment). Unfortunately, it's often the case that a young dog's seasonal allergies turn into year-round allergies.

The more reactive your pet's immune system grows to substances in the environment, the more intense and long-lasting his allergic response becomes. That's why it's extremely important to begin addressing potential root causes, including microbiome imbalances, at the first sign of an allergic response, no matter how mild it appears at its onset.

Topical Treatments for Seasonal Allergies

My recommendation, once warm weather arrives, is to rinse your dog regularly and do daily foot soaks and eye rinses. Since dogs who are outside a lot collect millions of allergens, it's just common sense to rinse them off, which can provide immediate relief for irritated, inflamed skin.

When it's time to actually bathe your dog, I recommend using only **grain-free and pH balanced shampoos**. Because oatmeal is a carbohydrate and carbs can feed yeast, I don't recommend oatmeal shampoos for yeasty pets.

Follow up with a lemon juice or vinegar rinse to help manage yeast infections. Just add one cup of vinegar or one cup of lemon juice — or 10 drops of peppermint oil with 10 drops of lavender oil — to a gallon of water. Since lemon juice can also lighten fur, I usually recommend vinegar or the essential oil mixes for dogs with dark coats. Using cooled green tea as a soothing rinse can also help with inflamed and irritated skin.

If your pet has been prescribed a medicated antibacterial shampoo, rebalancing the skin's microbiome is a wise idea: mix a teaspoon of probiotic powder in a quart of water and pour over your pet from the neck to the tail, rub in and towel dry.

Foot soaks are a great way to reduce the number of allergens your pet tracks into the house and deposits all over her indoor environment.

Daily eye rinses can also be very effective for dogs who are pawing at their eyes. It's very important that you do not use human medicated eye drops. Colloidal silver can be safely used to disinfect your pet's face and the delicate areas around the eyes.

Colloidal silver solution can also be used to swab out irritated ears, followed by a light dusting of French green clay, which absorbs moisture and helps prevent secondary ear infections.

Additional Important Recommendations

The following are also important commonsense, all-natural steps you can take to help ease your allergic dog's discomfort. If you know your furry family member has seasonal allergies, I strongly recommend not waiting until symptoms get worse to start an allergy protocol. Preventing systemic inflammation is a whole lot easier than addressing a profound allergic response, once it's underway.

1. **Evaluate your dog's diet** — One of the first things I do for a pet with allergies is review their diet and check for **leaky gut syndrome** (dysbiosis), which is often the reason seasonal allergies get progressively worse from one year to the next. Your pet's gastrointestinal (GI) tract has the very important job of deciding what nutrients to allow into the bloodstream, and which to keep out. The job of the GI tract is to allow nutrients in while keeping allergens out. When the gut starts to "leak," it means it's allowing allergens into the bloodstream.

Medications, especially antibiotics and steroids, cause leaky gut syndrome. Any pet on routine drug therapy should be assessed for a leaky gut. Another trigger for leaky gut is an ultraprocessed diet that contain glyphosate residues, mycotoxins, and chemical byproducts of high-heat processing (advanced glycation end products) that negatively affect the immune system.

Pets with allergies should be transitioned to a fresher, minimally processed anti-inflammatory diet very low in starch content (less than 15%). It should contain no soy, corn, rice, whole wheat, tapioca, peas, lentils, chickpeas, or potatoes. By eliminating extra sugar and carbohydrates in the diet, you'll also limit the food supply for yeast, which can be very beneficial for allergic pets.

It's also important to offer your pet clean, pure drinking water that doesn't contain fluoride, fluorine, heavy metals, or other contaminants.

2. **Supplement essential fatty acids (EFA) and lauric acid** — I recommend boosting the omega-3 fatty acids in your allergic pet's diet. The best sources of DHA and EPA come from the ocean, including responsibly sourced **krill**, squid, anchovy, and sardine oil, and other sources of fish body oils. Phytoplankton supplements do not contain enough omega-3 fatty acids to moderate allergic inflammatory responses or meet minimum EFA requirements for dogs and cats.

I also recommend coconut oil for allergic pets because it contains lauric acid, which has natural antifungal properties that can help suppress the production of yeast in the body. Omega-3 oils combined with coconut oil can modulate or even suppress the inflammatory response in allergic pets.

3. **Minimize indoor allergens** — Another step you can take to help your allergic dog is reduce allergens and toxins around your home. Vacuum all carpets, rugs, and upholstery, clean hard floors, and wash pet and human bedding in natural, fragrance-free detergent at least once a week. Don't use dryer sheets.

Keep the areas of your home where your dog spends most of her time as allergen-free as possible. Use **nontoxic cleaning agents** instead of traditional household cleaners.

During allergy season, keep windows closed as much as possible, and change the filters on your heating or air circulation unit often. Invest in an air purifier to remove allergens inside the house. Also consider protecting your pet's bed with a dust mite cover that can be frequently washed to help reduce allergen contamination that she may be bringing in from outside.

I also recommend eliminating all chemical **air scenting products** such as plug ins, candles, room sprays and pet odor sprays that contain toxic ingredients.

4. **Give natural antihistamines** — There are supplements I routinely prescribe to pets with seasonal allergic issues starting with quercetin, which is a bioflavonoid with anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antihistamine properties. I call it "nature's Benadryl," because it's very effective at suppressing histamine release.

I also recommend adding a stinging nettle supplement to your pet's springtime allergy protocol at the same time, to keep histamine levels low before the season is in full swing. Herbs such as butterbur, sorrel, verbena, elderflower, and cat's claw have a documented history of helping animals combat seasonal allergic responses, as does supplemental vitamin C.

I recommend starting this protocol with an allergic pet several weeks before the weather begins to warm up or a month before your dog normally shows allergy symptoms.

Plant sterols and sterolins, which are anti-inflammatory agents, have also been used successfully to modulate the immune system toward a more balanced response in allergic patients. Immune-modulating supplements, such as arabinogalactans, can also be beneficial.

Locally produced honey contains a small amount of pollen from the local area that may help desensitize the body to local allergens over time. Usually, the best place to find local honey is at a farmer's market or neighborhood health food store. Check with your veterinarian about the right dose for your dog or cat.

Most importantly, begin a seasonal allergy support protocol before your pet becomes itchy, red, and inflamed. Waiting until your pet grows miserable makes it difficult to get through allergy season without using allergy drugs that have side effects. Instituting a natural support protocol before allergy season commences means

you have the potential to moderate your animal's histamine production, which can result in milder symptoms and a less itchy pet.

5. **Consider a desensitization protocol** — If you've tried the above suggestions with limited success, I recommend helping your pet's immune system quiet down through desensitization. This can be achieved through a technique integrative practitioners use called Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Techniques (NAET) performed by practitioners trained to treat dogs and cats, or through sublingual immunotherapy.

Sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) is a variation on allergy injections to treat atopic dermatitis (skin allergies) in dogs, cats, and horses. SLIT is common in Europe and is used to treat respiratory and skin allergies in people. Sublingual immunotherapy is given orally, which can be much easier on both you and your dog than injections.

I've had good success using a sublingual product called regionally specific immunotherapy, or RESPIT[®]. I like it because it doesn't rely on testing to determine what your dog is allergic to. It uses a mixture of the most significant regional allergens instead.

If you decide to try sublingual immunotherapy, it's important to know that most pets require an "immediate relief" protocol (including therapeutic bathing, herbs and nutraceuticals that reduce inflammation), in addition to beginning a desensitization protocol of any kind.

Desensitizing pets is one of the best long-term solutions for managing allergies, and sublingual immunotherapy is a needle-free option.

Sources and References

[PetMD, September 15, 2023](#)
