

## These Things Can Affect Your Pet's Feet Like a Badly Fitted Shoe

Most likely your pet isn't into shoes or their associated fashion statement. But their paws still have many jobs to do, and can take quite a beating. And you might be completely surprised by the number of totally unrelated issues that can affect their pain level in walking about.

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

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Your dog's paws do a lot of work and can take a real beating
- While minor paw and nail problems usually heal quickly on their own, there are a number of diseases and disorders that can directly or indirectly damage your dog's feet
- A few of these conditions include yeast infections, mite infestations (demodectic mange), ticks and certain autoimmune disorders
- If your dog seems preoccupied with his feet or you notice any change in the appearance of his paws or nails, it's important to make an appointment with your veterinarian

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Just like human feet, dogs' paws have a lot of jobs to do. And since our furry pals aren't really into footwear and tend not to worry about what they're stepping in or on, their paws and nails can take quite a beating. This is especially true for working and hunting dogs, as well as canine athletes.

Fortunately, canine feet are tough and durable, so minor paw and nail problems tend to heal quickly on their own. However, many dog parents don't realize there are a number of canine disorders and diseases that seem unconnected to their pet's paws and nails, but that can have a significant effect on them, including the following conditions.

### 5 Disorders That Can Damage Your Dog's Paws

1. **Yeast infection** — Dogs have a normal amount of healthy levels of yeast that occur naturally on the body, including on the paws. Healthy levels of flora are possible thanks to a balanced immune system. Dogs with an underactive immune system or who are immunosuppressed can end up with a **yeast infection**, as can dogs with overactive immune systems that result in allergies.

You'll be able to tell if your dog has a yeast infection by the way she smells, because yeast has a very characteristic odor. Some people think it smells like moldy bread; others liken the odor to cheese popcorn or corn chips. In fact, some people refer to a yeast infection of a dog's paws as "Frito Feet." It's a pungent, musty, unpleasant smell.

Yeast overgrowth is tremendously itchy, so dogs with yeast infections do a lot of scratching. If it's a problem

with her paws, your dog won't be able to leave them alone. The same goes for her ears. A lot of butt scooting can also be a clue.

Definitive diagnosis of a yeast infection must be made by your veterinarian and is accomplished either by cytology (looking at a skin swab under a microscope) or culturing (submitting a sterile swab of the skin to the lab where the cells are grown and identified on a petri dish).

2. **Demodectic mange** — Demodectic mange is also called red mange, follicular mange and puppy mange, because it's most often seen in young dogs. It's caused by the mite species *Demodex canis*, which lives inside the hair follicles, and is usually the result of an underdeveloped or suppressed immune system.

There are three varieties of demodectic mange, one of which is called demodectic pododermatitis.

Demodectic pododermatitis is confined to the foot and creates secondary bacterial infections between the toes and the pads of the feet. The condition causes tremendous itching as a result of secondary infections that are almost always present along with the mites. You'll probably also notice some hair loss, bald spots, scabbing and sores on the skin.

The presence of demodectic mites (which can only be determined with a skin scraping or biopsy) doesn't confirm the diagnosis, because the mites live in all dogs. There must be both mites and skin lesions for a diagnosis of demodectic mange.

Because this type of mange points to a genetically predisposed weakened immune system, a confirmed diagnosis in an adult dog should always prompt testing for other conditions like Cushing's disease, hypothyroidism, heartworm disease, cancer or immune deficiency.

3. **Ticks** — If you live in a tick-endemic area, you may already know that a common spot to find one of the little bloodsuckers is between your dog's toes. That's why it's extremely important to check for ticks at least once a day during pest season if you live where they are prevalent.

Be sure to check areas of your pet's body where ticks can hide, like between and on the underside of the toes, in the earflaps and around the tail base. Removing ticks immediately is a crucially important step in reducing your dog's risk of acquiring a tick-borne infection or even tick paralysis.

If you find a tick, be sure to remove it right away, and very carefully. Don't use your bare hands because you risk becoming infected by handling or crushing an infected tick. Wear gloves, or even better, use a tick removal tool. Grasp the tick very close to your pet's skin with a tick removal tool or a pair of tweezers.

Carefully pull the tick's body away from the skin. Once it's off, flush it down the toilet. Then disinfect your dog's skin with soapy water or diluted povidone iodine (Betadine). I also recommend applying a drop of lavender oil to the bite. Monitor the attachment site for the next few days. If you notice any irritation or inflammation of the skin, contact your veterinarian.

4. **Pemphigus foliaceus (PF)** — PF is an autoimmune skin disease that causes pustules (pus-filled blisters) and crusting on the surface of the skin. The skin beneath the crusts is raw and can be painful. The pustules are often first seen on a dog's face and ears, but can spread to other areas of the body. There can also be thickening and cracking of the footpads, and difficulty walking.

In dogs with PF, the immune system sees certain normal components of the skin as foreign invaders and mounts an attack against them, resulting in inflammation and damage to the two top layers of the epidermis,

which leads to crusting. Pemphigus foliaceus can be idiopathic (meaning the cause can't be identified), and it can also be triggered by certain drugs.

To confirm a diagnosis of PF, your veterinarian will need to take skin samples for biopsy. Traditional treatment involves long-term (usually lifelong) corticosteroid therapy, however, integrative vets focus on modulating the immune system with Chinese herbs and nutraceuticals, along with microbiome evaluation and appropriate detoxification. Because **PF is an autoimmune disorder**, if your dog has the condition he should never be vaccinated.

5. **Symmetric lupoid onychodystrophy/onychitis (SLO)** — SLO is actually an autoimmune disease that specifically affects the claws, causing pain, nail splitting and lost nails. Once the nails fall or slough off, they often grow back in misshapen, dry, brittle and crumbly. The condition typically affects multiple claws on all four paws.

SLO can also cause chronic lameness in dogs, swollen toes, bleeding from the claws and secondary skin or claw infections. If your dog is diagnosed with this condition, I recommend finding an **integrative veterinarian**. In some cases, treatment with essential fatty acids, vitamin E, niacinamide (vitamin B3) and moringa may help.

Since there are so many things that can go wrong with your dog's paws, from a minor scrape or torn toenail to a serious underlying disease, it's always a good idea to make an appointment with your veterinarian if you see your dog licking or chewing at his feet, if the appearance of his paws or nails changes in any way, and certainly if he seems he's having trouble walking due to a problem with his feet.

## Sources and References

[PetMD](#)

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