

Is Your Dog Constantly Licking Their Paws? It Could Be This

If you see your dog gnawing or licking his paws incessantly, check for this common infection. If not treated, it could lead to discomfort and other symptoms.

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Yeast infections in dogs, often caused by *Malassezia pachydermatis*, result from an imbalance in skin fungi. Symptoms include excessive paw licking, a musty odor and skin irritation
- Factors triggering yeast overgrowth include environmental issues, food sensitivities, allergies, parasites, and compromised immune systems. Dogs with certain diseases or on steroids are more susceptible
- Paws are particularly vulnerable to yeast infections due to exposure to moisture, dirt and irritants. Symptoms include redness, discharge, hair loss and persistent licking or chewing
- Treatment involves regular disinfection using foot soaks with povidone iodine, antifungal ear solutions, and therapeutic rinses. Addressing the dog's diet is crucial for managing chronic infections
- An anti-inflammatory, low-starch diet with novel proteins and antifungal foods help control yeast overgrowth. Adding probiotics and herbs also support gut health and reduce infection risk

If you notice your dog frequently and obsessively licking and chewing their paws, it could be a sign of a yeast infection. Also known as yeast dermatitis, this is a condition caused by a spore-like type of fungi that reproduces via budding — this is a process wherein portions of the organism's cell body break off to create a whole new yeast organism.

Yeast is actually present in small amounts on a dog's skin, but when it excessively multiplies, it causes an imbalance. In most cases, a yeast called *Malassezia pachydermatis* (*M. pachydermatis*) triggers this infection. One of the most obvious signs is a persistent, musty "stinky dog" smell.

What Causes Yeast Overgrowth?

Yeast are opportunistic organisms — if there's an imbalance in your dog's system, they take advantage, spreading to other areas they don't usually inhabit. Several factors trigger this imbalance, including environmental triggers, food sensitivities and allergies, and even parasites like fleas.¹

Dogs with an immunocompromised system are also more prone to yeast infections, since their body cannot control the overgrowth. Examples include dogs with Cushing's disease, immunoglobulin deficiency or those taking prescription steroids like prednisone.

Itching is a common symptom of yeast infection, and it can be mild or severe. Since yeast can grow anywhere on your dog's body, it causes extreme discomfort. The distinct stinky odor is another symptom — pet parents describe it as reminiscent of moldy bread, cheese popcorn or corn chips.

Yeast Infection on Paws — Symptoms to Watch Out For

If the yeast infection occurs on your pet's toes or paws (yeast thrives in moist, hard-to-reach places, like in between the toes), you'll notice your dog having a hard time leaving these areas alone, excessively licking and chewing them. And when you look closer, you'll notice other telltale symptoms — skin redness and irritation, pink staining on the hairs around the paws, brown discharge coming from the nail beds and hair loss.²

Dogs develop yeast infection on their paws mainly because the paws get exposed to everything. They touch wet and dirty surfaces, allowing dirt and moisture to become trapped in the crevices between the pads and toes. Your dog's paws also come into contact with irritants like grass and weeds, which trigger allergies and cause small injuries like cuts and scratches. These make the paws more susceptible to yeast infections.³

Other Signs Your Pup Has a Yeast Infection

Aside from their paws, your dog's ears are the most common area affected by yeast infections. If you see them pawing at their ears incessantly, that could be a sign of yeast overgrowth. Other signs of yeast infection include:

- Redness and inflammation, especially around the ears, toes and pads of their feet, facial folds, anus, under the armpits or neck and around the tail base
- Secondary bacterial infection
- Raised, scaly areas of skin
- Scaly or oily skin
- Dark, thick skin
- Hair loss
- Greasy fur
- Smelly, yellow-green discharge from the ears
- Behavioral changes, including depression, anxiety, loss of appetite and aggression

Since yeast spreads, most dogs with a yeast infection usually have it in more than one spot. For example, they can have it on both ears or all four paws. In severe cases, the infection is all over their entire body.

Do This for Yeast Infections on Paws

Disinfecting your pet's skin regularly is important. If the yeast overgrowth is on your pet's paws, it's best to give them a foot soak regularly, fully submerging their paws. Use povidone iodine (Betadine), as it is safe and nontoxic with anti-yeast, antibacterial and antifungal actions. Make sure you add enough iodine to the water to turn it the color of iced tea.

If the infection is in their ears, use a vet-prescribed, natural antifungal solution and regularly apply it to their ears using cotton balls. This will keep the yeast infection from worsening or becoming a mixed bacterial infection.

For skin yeast infections, a natural antifungal shampoo and a therapeutic rinse will be helpful. To make a therapeutic rinse, combine 1 cup of lemon juice vinegar (for pets with dark coats), 10 drops of peppermint oil, and 10 drops of lavender oil and a gallon of water. Use this after bathing, but make sure not to pour it over their eyes. Don't rinse;

simply towel dry afterwards.

Addressing Their Diet Is the Best Strategy for Chronic Yeast Infections

Remember that even if you religiously do the strategies above to treat the yeast infection, it will not go away if you don't address the most important aspect of your pet's health — their diet. What your dog eats can either support or exacerbate the infection, leading to overgrowth, hence you need to provide them with an anti-inflammatory and species-specific "anti-yeast diet" until their condition is under control. Keep these pointers in mind.

- Switch to a novel protein — a meat you haven't fed before, like bison, venison or duck
- Aim for low- or no-starch. Yeast needs sugar to thrive, and carbs break down into sugar
- Add antifungal foods to their meals, like small amounts of fresh garlic, oregano, parsley and thyme to help reduce their level of yeast
- Establish your dog's healthy gut flora with fermented vegetables (without onions)
- Give them spore-forming probiotics or herbs to establish their gut microbiome. Berberine, pau d'arco and barberry are some recommended choices

Sources and References

^{1,2,3} [Manila Standard, August 31, 2024](#)
