

# Is Your Pet Losing Fur? When It's More Than Just Shedding

If you're seeing bald spots on your dog, it may be more than just a skin condition. Learn the real causes of hair loss and how to help their coat thrive.

Reviewed by Dr. Elizabeth Hardoon

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Bald spots, thinning coats, or irritated skin may point to underlying health issues like parasites, allergies, or hormonal imbalances
- Hair loss can appear as dry patches, scabs, or crusty skin. Some dogs show discomfort or itchiness, while others seem unaffected
- From fleas and food sensitivities to stress, poor nutrition, or autoimmune conditions, finding the root cause is essential to proper treatment
- Your vet may use skin scrapings, allergy tests, or bloodwork to uncover what's really behind your dog's hair loss
- Healthy food, stress reduction, parasite control, and vet-prescribed treatments can help your dog's coat grow back strong and shiny

When you run your hand along your dog's back and feel patches of bare skin instead of a soft, furry coat, it can be upsetting. You might wonder — "Is this normal shedding, or is something wrong?" Hair loss in dogs, known as alopecia, is more common than you think — and while it's not always serious, it's something you should never ignore.

This guide will walk you through everything you need to know, from spotting the first signs of hair loss to understanding what might be causing it — and most importantly, what you can do to help your dog feel and look their best.

## Hair Loss vs. Normal Shedding — What's the Difference?

Dogs naturally shed to get rid of old or damaged hair. Breeds like Huskies, Labs, and German Shepherds can shed a lot — especially in the spring and fall. This type of shedding is healthy and normal. You'll usually see it all over your dog's body and notice extra fur on furniture, clothes, and carpets. According to the American Kennel Club:<sup>1</sup>

*"In the case of normal shedding, some dogs have a double coat, meaning they have a topcoat and an undercoat. The topcoat gives your dog their distinctive coloring and texture along with protecting their skin from moisture and debris. Their undercoat, which lies under the topcoat, tends to shed year-round."*

Alopecia is different. It doesn't follow seasonal patterns, but instead shows up as bald spots, thinning patches, or areas where your dog's coat seems to be vanishing. Sometimes, the skin underneath may look irritated, red, flaky, or even infected, and your dog may exhibit signs of discomfort or even pain.<sup>2</sup>

## The Many Faces of Alopecia — What Hair Loss Can Look Like

Hair loss in dogs doesn't always look the same. Here are some common signs:

- Patches of missing hair, often on the back, belly, tail, or ears
- Thinning coat or overall reduced hair density
- Scabs, sores, or thickened skin
- Redness, swelling, or skin that smells bad
- Crusty or flaky spots that your dog scratches often
- Changes in color or texture of the skin
- Your dog licking, chewing, or scratching the same spot repeatedly

Some dogs show signs of itchiness or discomfort, while others seem completely unbothered. Still, any unexplained hair loss is a good reason to call your vet, especially if the symptoms are persistent or becoming worse.

## 10 Possible Reasons Why Your Dog Is Losing Hair

There are many reasons why dogs lose hair. Some are simple, like a flea bite. Others are more complex, like a hormonal imbalance. Whatever the cause, it usually falls under three categories — medical, environmental or behavioral. Understanding the root cause is the first step to fixing the problem.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

1. **Parasites** — Fleas, ticks, lice, and mites can all lead to major hair loss. Even one flea bite can cause a reaction known as flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), where your dog becomes hypersensitive to flea saliva.

Signs of parasites such as fleas may include itching and hair loss — especially near the tail, small raised red bumps and black flakes in the coat — known as "flea dirt." They can spread easily between pets and around the home. Natural flea and tick preventatives, medicated baths, and cleaning bedding thoroughly can help ease this condition.

2. **Allergies** — Proteins in food, dust mites, mold, pollen, or even your laundry detergent can trigger allergic reactions in pets. These allergens cause your dog's immune system to overreact, often leading to skin inflammation and hair loss. If your pet is itching because of allergies, signs will include licking their paws, scratching their ears or bellies, and having frequent ear infections.

If you suspect an allergy, bring your pet to the vet for an allergy test. They may recommend lifestyle changes such as reducing environmental exposure to allergens as well as switching to a non-inflammatory or hypoallergenic diet.

3. **Bacterial and fungal infections** — Ringworm (a fungal infection), yeast overgrowth, and bacterial infections can all affect the skin and hair follicles. These can appear as round patches with crusty edges or swollen and inflamed areas of skin with or without crusting. Look for signs like redness, flaky skin, scabs, and sometimes an odor.

Topical creams such as those containing natural colloidal silver or calendula as well as more frequent bathing may help to relieve inflammation. In some cases your pet may need prescription medications to resolve the infection.

4. **Hormonal imbalances** — Hormones play a big role in your dog's skin and coat health. Two of the most common disorders are:

- **Hypothyroidism** — This occurs when the thyroid doesn't produce enough hormone. Leads to slow metabolism, weight gain, dry skin, and thinning hair.
- **Cushing's disease** — The body produces too much cortisol, causing hair loss, thinning skin, increased thirst and appetite, and at later stages a pot-bellied appearance.

Certain breeds are at higher risk of these imbalances, particularly Bulldogs, Dachshunds, Dobermans, and Greyhounds.<sup>6</sup>

5. **Genetics** — Some breeds are simply born with a greater risk of alopecia. Hairless breeds like the Xoloitzcuintli and Chinese Crested naturally have sparse coats. Others, like Chihuahuas, Dachshunds, and Boston Terriers, may have inherited forms of alopecia that begin in puppyhood or young adulthood. Although these genetic conditions often don't hurt your dog's health, you should still monitor their skin closely.
6. **Stress, anxiety, and compulsive behaviors** — Changes in the household — like moving, a new pet, or even loud noises — can trigger stress and anxiety. Some dogs cope by licking, chewing, or scratching the same area repeatedly, creating bald patches or sores.

Daily exercise, mental stimulation from interactive toys, providing safe spaces, and sticking to a consistent routine can help calm your pet.

7. **Poor nutrition** — Your dog's coat reflects what they eat. If their food is low in protein, essential fats and omega-3's, or key vitamins like A, E, zinc, or biotin, it can lead to a dull, brittle coat and hair loss. Feeding a high-quality, species-appropriate diet and providing appropriate supplements may help bring back balance to your pet's nutrient intake.
8. **Physical trauma or friction** — A too-tight collar, rough grooming, or constant friction from clothing or harnesses can damage the hair and skin underneath. This is especially prevalent in the neck, chest and axillae (armpit) areas. Always check areas under collars, straps, or where your dog lies down often for signs of irritation.
9. **Medication side effects or cancer treatment** — Chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or even some long-term medications (such as steroids) can lead to temporary or permanent hair loss. This is usually expected and can be managed with extra care, grooming, and comfort.
10. **Autoimmune or immune system disorders** — Conditions like lupus or pemphigus or even types of skin cancer can cause your dog's immune system to attack its own skin and hair follicles. Look for discolored or bald spots on your pet's body — especially on your pet's face, mouth and the bottom of their paws. These are more serious and often cause sores, scabbing, and significant discomfort and do not resolve with antibacterial or antifungal treatments.

## How Vets Get to the Bottom of Hair Loss

If you notice your dog is losing hair all the time, and the symptoms are worsening, it's time to schedule a trip to the vet to get to the bottom of the issue. To figure out what's causing the hair loss, your vet will:

1. Ask questions, like how long has it been happening? Is your dog itchy? Has anything changed at home?
2. Do a physical exam to look for hair loss patterns, parasites, skin damage, and signs of infection.
3. Run tests including skin scraping, allergy testing, blood tests and skin biopsy (if autoimmune conditions or cancer are suspected).

Once your vet finds the cause, they'll create a plan that may include:

- Short-term relief, like bathing with medicated shampoos, sprays, or anti-itch creams
- Flea and tick preventatives, allergy meds, or hormone treatments for thyroid or Cushing's disease
- Dietary changes to address food allergies or nutrition deficiencies; herbal therapy or supplements may also be prescribed
- Long-term management includes regularly checking for parasites, implementing a stress-reducing routine, and going on regular vet visits to catch flare-ups early

## 'How Long Will It Take for My Dog's Hair to Grow Back?'

This depends on what's causing the hair loss. In mild cases, like a flea bite or temporary stress, hair can start to grow back in two to four weeks. If your dog has a chronic condition like hypothyroidism, it may take months to see improvement — and treatment may be ongoing for life.

You can't always prevent alopecia, especially if it's caused by genetics or certain diseases. But many types are preventable or manageable with the strategies mentioned above. However, if you're unsure whether your pet's hair loss is serious, these signs mean it's time to get help:

- Bald spots are growing or spreading
- Your dog is in pain or very itchy
- The skin is red, inflamed, or smells bad
- Your dog is tired, losing weight, or acting differently
- The hair isn't growing back after four to six weeks

Remember that early diagnosis makes treatment easier and more effective. Don't wait until the problem gets worse. Your dog's environment matters as well. You can support their recovery at home by keeping their bedding clean, and grooming them regularly, using a cone to limit their scratching, using gentle soaps or sprays, and easing their emotional stress by encouraging playtime and bonding sessions.

## A Healthy, Full Coat Starts with You

Hair loss in dogs can either be a sign of something small — or something that needs long-term care. Either way, you don't have to figure it out alone. By learning what to look for, taking quick action, and working closely with your vet, you can help your dog stay healthy and happy — and with their fur intact.

### Sources and References

<sup>1,4,6</sup> [American Kennel Club, August 21, 2024](#).

<sup>2,3</sup> [Lebanon Animal Hospital, Hair Loss in Pets: How to Spot and Treat the Problem](#)

<sup>5</sup> [MyFurries, April 7, 2025](#)

---