

# Triggers Doggie Dandruff and Skin Problems, Do You Let Any of These Things Slide?

Most doggie dandruff actually stems from one of these 3 things. Or may exacerbate a mild issue. It's often a food issue even in the best feeding plans, but not always. It may not be food-related at all. Decide for yourself once you read this.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Your dog can develop dry, flakey skin similar to human dandruff
- One of the reasons dogs develop dandruff is an underlying medical condition such as hypothyroidism, or a skin infection
- Another very common cause of flakey skin in dogs is nutritional deficiency; a lack of omega-3 essential fatty acids in the diet and/or an imbalance of omega-3s and omega-6s
- To help improve the condition of your dog's skin and coat, it's also important to brush her regularly, and bathe her when she needs it
- Some dogs rarely need a bath, while others with oily or flakey skin and hair should be bathed at least weekly

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If your canine companion has a case of doggy dandruff, there's probably a reason for it that needs to be addressed. Most dandruff in dogs is the result of a grooming/bathing issue, a nutritional deficiency or an underlying medical problem that affects the condition of the skin and coat.

## First Step — Ruling Out an Underlying Medical Disorder

Make an appointment with your veterinarian as a first step. Dogs can develop metabolic conditions that inhibit the turnover rate of skin cells. Thyroid problems are a common culprit, especially canine hypothyroidism. 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. There's actually a parasitic mite called "Walking Dandruff."

If your furry family member is dealing with dry, flakey skin, it's important to have your veterinarian check your dog for an underlying medical condition. Diagnosis and appropriate treatment may also resolve the dandruff problem.

## Omega-3s Are Often the Cure for Doggy Dandruff

If there's no disease process contributing to your dog's flakey skin, the next step is to investigate for a nutritional deficiency, since a dietary lack of omega-3 essential fatty acids is the most common cause of dry, flakey skin in pets. Dogs need an abundance of omega-3s in their diet to be optimally healthy. The manufacturing process involved in producing most commercial pet food destroys the nutritional benefit of omega-3s.

Even if you're feeding a homemade diet, if you're not following a nutritionally balanced recipe that calls for extra EFAs/omega-3 fatty acids, or unless you're feeding fish on a daily basis (not recommended), your pet's diet is probably unbalanced for fatty acids. Homemade diets often also lack zinc and vitamin E, which support healthy skin formation and turnover rates. Some breeds also require more of these trace nutrients lacking in many diets.

Whether you feed a commercial diet or a homemade diet, you may need to supplement with essential fatty acids like krill oil. Not only are omega-3s important for your dog or cat, so is the dietary ratio of omega-3s to omega-6s. Most pet diets, whether purchased or homemade, are high in omega-6 fatty acids (unless they include fresh sources of seafood).

Supplementing with additional omega-6s in the form of corn, sunflower, safflower 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.

Another healthy oil that can help improve your dog's dandruff is **coconut oil** (given both internally and topically). Supplementing coconut oil in the diet provides extra healthy fats (but negligible amounts of EFAs, so it should be combined with omega-3 supplementation), which can be beneficial for many organ systems.

Topical coconut oil treatments can be very helpful in improving the integrity of flaking skin. They also support the lipid barrier, which makes the 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 dog first and dry her thoroughly. Use 100% organic, cold-pressed and human-grade coconut oil. Apply the coconut oil to your dog's body like a mask.

The coconut oil will not only help keep your dog's skin soft, but will also improve the natural defenses of the skin. Coconut oil also contains lauric acid, which supports the immune system whether taken orally or used topically.

## Grooming or Bathing Issues?

Lack of grooming or insufficient grooming can result in a buildup of dead skin under your pet's coat, especially in long-haired and double-coated dog breeds. If loose and dead hair isn't removed on a regular basis, excessive flaking will accumulate as the dead skin mixes with the undercoat. That's why regular brushing helps keep your dog's coat and skin in good condition.

Too many, or more commonly, too few baths can also be a reason for dry, flakey skin. It once was that people were warned not to bathe their pets at all, or very rarely, but that was back when shampoos were made with harsh, caustic ingredients. Too much shampooing with those first generation products was hard on both human scalps and pets' skin, creating irritation and excessive flaking in both. These days, however, there are plenty of safe, gentle shampoos available for pets.

A good rule of thumb is that your dog should be bathed as often as he needs it. Some dogs rarely need a bath, while others with oily or flakey 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. If you live in a dry climate, your pet may need fewer baths than dogs 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.

Bathing your dog every day is overdoing it, and can cause skin and coat dryness. Never bathing your pet, on the other hand, allows buildup of dead skin and hair. Select a gentle, organic shampoo specifically designed for dogs. You might also want to follow up with an all-natural, species-specific conditioner to moisturize and condition your pet's skin and coat.

**Sources and References**

[PetMD \(Archived\)](#)

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