

Dog Allergies - Symptoms & treatment of canine allergies

Dogs can suffer from dog allergies just as easily as can humans suffer from 'people allergies'. In fact canine allergies are much more common than many dog owners realize.

If your pup is always licking, scratching or biting at himself, shakes his head a lot or has recurring ear infections, it's possible that he's showing dog allergy symptoms.

'Hot spots' (patches of red, irritated skin), coughing, sneezing or discharge from his eyes or nose can be other signs of canine allergies.

What exactly are dog allergies?

Regardless of what is triggering an allergy, the most common symptoms are seen on the skin. There are also a growing number of dog food allergies today, due to the increasing amounts of chemicals and additives in dog food, and the decreasing quality of other ingredients.

When it comes to treating dog allergies, it's important to find out what is causing the problem in the first place. Although the symptoms are pretty much the same regardless of the 'trigger factor', there are a range of different reasons for the reaction.

Allergic reactions involving the skin can also be related to flea allergies, inhalant allergies, or contact allergies. Sometimes reactions such as hives, swelling and itching can also result after vaccinations.

Puppies generally don't show any signs of allergies at first, but can develop any of the allergy symptoms (or combination of symptoms) after they're about a year old. It's been shown that puppies tend to 'grow into' their allergies as they mature. This is due to their exposure to allergens in dog food ingredients, their environment, vaccinations etc. They become sensitized to these substances as their exposure to them increases.

It makes sense to try to minimize your puppy's contact with allergens as much as possible, although of course you don't want him to live in a 'bubble'!

Two big steps towards reducing Fido's chances of developing canine allergies are very simple for you to take -

- Feed your puppy a high-quality, natural dog food. Organic dog foods or those especially designed to minimize allergies and support the immune system are the best choice.
- Maintain an effective flea treatment/prevention routine, by applying a superior, topical flea and tick preventative such as Frontline or Adventix, and continuing to do so throughout flea season (which could be year round depending on where you live).

Dog Allergy Symptoms

If you do notice that Fido starts to clean/lick himself compulsively, don't just put it down to his super-hygienic nature... it's much more likely that he's suffering from dog allergies!

Canine skin allergies can be caused by flea allergy, dog food allergy, even contact or inhalant allergy.

These type of reactions are characterized by red, itchy, irritated skin or scabby areas, brown-coloured patches or hair loss.

Any of the following could also be a dog allergy symptom:

- A seemingly bad case of dandruff
- Excessive scratching or licking (especially at paws, tummy, tail area)
- Face rubbing
- Rashes or 'hot spots'
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Breathing difficulties
- Eye or nose discharge
- Shaking of the head or pawing at the ears
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Loss of appetite

The last three symptoms are more likely to occur due to a *food intolerance*, rather than a true allergy though.

Diagnosing and treating dog allergies

Hot spots, itching, rashes, hair loss.... these can make your puppy miserable, and that makes you miserable too!

Treating the symptoms and reducing your pups allergic response to triggers is very important, but it's also best to figure out what type of dog allergies your pup is suffering from. Your veterinarian can run allergy tests for you, instead of you doing the 'detective work' yourself.

It's more difficult to find the root cause of some allergies than others. For example a flea allergy isn't too hard to detect - if your pup has fleas and has irritated, red patches of skin and even hair loss, then chances are good that he's allergic to flea saliva!

Contact allergies are also usually not too difficult to track down. If you recently put a new collar/sweater/smell-good spray etc. on Fido, and he's suddenly scratching and uncomfortable, you can take a pretty educated guess at what's causing the problem.

Other allergies such as inhalant allergies and dog food allergies can be more challenging. Your veterinarian can perform allergy tests on your dog (can be skin testing or blood tests) to check for reactions to certain allergens. If you suspect a dog food allergy, an elimination diet can be used to determine whether the allergy is food related and then to isolate the ingredient/s causing Fido to be so miserable.

The method best used for treating dog allergies, depends on the particular allergen, type of allergy, and severity of the dogs reaction to it.

For dog food skin allergies

Isolating the problematic ingredient/s and removing them from your dogs diet usually works well. Feeding only a high quality, natural or hypoallergenic food such as Royal Canine for Yorkies can help to prevent a recurrence of symptoms.

For a flea allergy

When treating dog allergies caused by flea saliva, the first thing to do is bathe your puppy or dog using a mild shampoo as prescribed by your local veterinarian. Then apply a superior, topical flea and tick medication such as Advantix or Frontline. Apply the flea treatment every 30 days (or as directed on the packet) to maintain protection. Flea season can last anywhere from 6 months to year round, depending on where you live.

If your pets skin condition is severe, or seems to be infected (if the area is very red, swollen, hot, painful or is scabby it could be infected), consult your veterinarian. He may want to treat your dog with dog allergy medication such as cortisone shots or oral allergy medications.

For contact allergy

Remove the cause of the reaction first! If it's a collar, sweater etc. that's easy and quick. If the reaction is more generalized, due to a deodorizing spray or contact with a dog bed washed in a new detergent for example, you need to bathe your pup using an oatmeal shampoo such as Oatmeal & Tea Tree Oil Cleanser .

An inhalant allergy

It can be difficult to protect your dog from inhalant allergies. If he has seasonal allergies, you can follow the advice given to humans - stay indoors as much as possible during allergy season, especially on windy days.

Also bathe your pup regularly with a gentle shampoo to remove dust, pollen and other allergens from his coat. For indoor allergies, use a high powered vacuum with a water filter. Your veterinarian may also prescribe allergy medications.

An antihistamine that's been especially formulated for your dog can be very effective at relieving allergy symptoms.

Allergic reaction to vaccinations

Occasionally, some puppies and dogs may suffer a reaction to one of the required vaccinations.

These dog vaccination allergies are usually mild to moderate, and symptoms can include a slight fever, swelling or redness at the location of the shot, lethargy or loss of appetite.

Symptoms can occur up to a week or more after the vaccination has been given and, although you should notify your vet of the situation, any medical treatment is rarely needed.

However, it's very important to be aware that, although a rare occurrence, it is possible for a dog to suffer a severe to life-threatening allergic reaction to vaccinations.

Signs of this type of allergy include swelling or hives/welts around or on the face, this could progress to include breathing problems, loss of balance, or seizures.

If you notice any swelling/hives of this type (usually occurs within minutes or hours) after your dog has received his shots, seek emergency veterinary attention right away.

Mange

There's a skin condition called Mange, which can mimic the symptoms of allergies. Mange in dogs is caused by tiny mites who live on, or under, the skin. There are two types of this disease - Demodectic Mange and Sarcoptic Mange. Both can produce symptoms which include itching, red irritated skin, hair loss and so on. If your dogs' symptoms are year-round and a dog food allergy is ruled out, your vet may consider taking a skin scraping to test for this condition.

... and finally

So now you know that dog allergies are actually very common, and can make your pup absolutely miserable!

If you suspect your dog is suffering from allergies, take action right away. There are many methods of canine allergy treatment so Fido doesn't have to suffer!

Left untreated canine allergies will only get worse, and it's much easier and effective to treat them earlier rather than later.