

Got Itch?

Every year I get loads of people asking me at the office, at parties and even on the street, "Hey my dog is itching, what can I do?". I could write volumes about the topic and bore you to tears, but I myself read best if it's short and to the point. Give me something that I can use and stop talking already. If your dog is over 1 year of age, chances are, your dog is itching due to allergies, so that's where we'll start.

Most common are inhaled allergies. Dogs can be allergic to inhaled pollens, dust, dust mites, weeds, trees and even

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grasses. About 90 % of all dogs with inhaled allergies are also allergic to fleas. What a flea allergic dog is actually allergic to is the saliva in the flea bite. Even a single flea bite can trigger itchiness in a highly allergic dog. Food allergies alone are responsible for only about 5-8% of allergies. However, some highly allergic dogs have inhaled, flea and food allergies. In a nut shell, here are some easy ways to make an itchy dog less itchy without going to the veterinarian and spending a lot of money.

1. Flea Control. Lots of the very effective topicals are now sold over the counter and there is even a cheaper, generic version of Frontline available. There is also a very effective monthly flea control that is given orally if you don't like the topical. Get the fleas out of the equation, remember if you're allergic to bee stings, all it takes is 1, you don't have to get stung by the whole hive. Flea allergic dogs are the same way so get rid of them.

2. Food. Change the food to a novel protein and carbohydrate source. This means one that your dog has never eaten before. If the dog has never been exposed to it, by definition, they can't be allergic to it. Bison, Venison, Duck, Fish and even Kangaroo are now available. Remember that any treats given to the dog have to be from the same protein or carbohydrate source and no raw hide chews or beef bones grocery store treats while trying the diet. You're going to have to feed your dog anyway, you might as well see if it improves the quality of your dog's life with a novel diet. Give it at least 6-8 weeks before you give up.

3. Omega 3 Fatty Acids. Found in great quantities in Fish

Oils, these omega 3's help to scavenge free radicals and are anti-inflammatory. Not only will they help itchy skin but also arthritic joints, hearts and even have some anti-cancer benefits. All dogs and people for that matter should be taking them. An adult Stafford should be getting 1000mg's twice daily. My dogs eat those nasty tasting capsules right off of their food, no opening necessary.

4. Antihistamines. These work best in combination with the fatty acids. They aren't miracle workers but they do help in some dogs. Benadryl given 1 1/2 - 2 standard adult sized capsules or tablets up to 3 times daily is what an adult Stafford could use. I also like Hydroxyzine 50 mg twice daily for an adult Stafford. Seems to help calm them down as well.

5. Locally made Raw Honey. Give 1 tbsp twice daily. Honey is made from the pollens from plants and using honey that was made locally insures that the plants from your area are the ones that were involved. The theory on why it works is that by giving by mouth what your dog might be allergic to daily, ultimately your dog will get hyposensitized to the allergens. In other words their bodies will say "Big deal, it's just that old rag weed again, no need to get all inflamed". I have used this in my practice and some clients absolutely swear by the results. No side effects, no harm done.

6. Bathe frequently. Washing and rinsing with cool water helps to rinse off possibly irritating, pollens, dander and debris and the cool water rinse is also anti-inflammatory. If the dog's skin is also infected from the constant scratching, I recommend bathing with either Chlorhexidine or a Benzoyl Peroxide shampoo, many times this alone will make an itchy dog better. Remember when you used to roll in the grass and would come home all itchy? The first thing that mom would do was to either bathe you or rinse you off in the hose, just makes sense doesn't it? Water is still cheap and bathing 2-3 times a week even more frequently in severe cases absolutely helps.

Like most problems with dog's health, most carry a very heritable component and allergies are no different. I've heard many times people say that health problems are fixed in the whelping pen. When I see an allergic dog most of the time we can trace it back to an itchy parent or grandparent, just another thing to think about when determining if and who we choose to put into our breeding programs. I hope that you will at least give some of these tips a try, after all, they were free!

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