



**My dog has  
been diagnosed with  
itchy skin**

# My dog has been diagnosed with itchy skin

## What is pruritus?

Pruritus, or itchiness, is the sensation that leads to the desire to scratch. As pets use their paws and mouth to relieve an itch, this includes the desire to chew, lick or bite at the skin.

## What are the signs that my dog feels pruritic?

In some conditions such as allergy the dog will nibble, chew or lick at what appears to be normal skin. In other conditions such as infections or where there are parasites like fleas there may be spots or a rash. The dog will generally make the skin much more sore and excoriated through its own activity, i.e. scratching, which can lead to extensive areas of scabs, redness or hair loss. Areas to look out for signs are the ears, groin, face, under the tail, skin folds including those where a leg joins the body, and paws including in between toes.

## What causes itchy skin?

Your dog may have multiple conditions contributing to the level of itchiness.

Common causes include:

- Allergies (to food, fleas, or environmental factors such as pollens or house dust mite)
- Parasites, such as lice or mites
- Infections caused by bacteria or yeast



Stress, even caused by a positive event, can also increase the sensation of itchiness your dog feels but rarely causes dogs to chew or lick unless there is already an underlying skin condition present.

## Is it dangerous?

Pruritus is unpleasant and the appearance of your dog's skin may be quite distressing. Pruritus is a symptom, rather than a cause, of illness; it is rarely an emergency and alone does not pose a threat to life. However, serious infections can develop if itchy skin goes untreated. Pruritus on rare occasions may also be an indicator of an internal condition that needs treatment. If your dog is showing other signs of ill health, such as changes in appetite or thirst, you should mention it to your vet.

## Why has my dog only started to itch recently?

Often, several conditions will work together to make your dog feel itchy. It may be that your dog is mildly allergic to something in your home, but it has only recently become a problem due to a separate infection or the stress of a change in lifestyle. Some conditions become more likely with age, and some take time to reach a level where signs are shown.

## How is pruritus managed?

Your vet may prescribe you a cream, spray, tablets or an injection to help make your dog more comfortable in the short term. Similarly, if your dog bites or licks itself excessively, an Elizabethan collar may be needed to stop the dog making the sores worse. Successful long term management requires treating the condition(s) causing your dog's itchiness. These will be specific to your dog. This may mean feeding them a special diet or changing their shampoo.



## What if my dog stays itchy?

As there are many possible causes of pruritus, it is possible that a single treatment or strategy will not fully cure your dog. You may have to trial different approaches, but with time you and your vet should be able to find an appropriate solution.

## What if the itchiness comes back?

For some causes of pruritus, especially problems like allergy, it is likely that your dog will become itchy again in the future, so it is important to keep an eye out for early signs of recurrence. While this may be frustrating, you and your vet will be well equipped to handle any future episodes, and these should be quicker to diagnose and resolve.

## How can I prevent further outbreaks?

Regular parasite treatment (e.g. 'spot on' or tablet for fleas, ticks and worms) is an effective preventative measure for some of the more common diseases that cause pruritus. If your dog is identified as having an allergy then avoiding the responsible allergens is important – for example pre-emptive medication in Spring for a pollen allergy, or careful selection of food, including treats. Regular visits to your vet for routine check-ups can also help to catch a resurgence before your dog becomes uncomfortable.

## Will my dog need medication for the rest of their life?

Unfortunately, some dogs especially those with allergies do need long term therapy. To try to keep them comfortable and keep levels of drugs to a minimum it is important to follow your vet's instructions closely and see any course of treatment through to the end, even if your dog stops itching before then. In the case of seasonal allergies (e.g. to pollen), your dog may need medication for the relevant



season(s) each year. Your dog may have a condition called 'atopic dermatitis'—this condition requires lifelong management, but this is successful in most cases.

## Is there a risk to myself/my other pets?

Some skin infections are transmissible to other animals, so it is important that your vet knows about any other pets you have. Other pets in your household could also pose a risk to your itchy dog. If your dog is allergic to fleas, for example, then you will need to treat all pets in your household, as even though they are not pruritic they could pass new fleas on to the affected dog. A smaller number of conditions can be passed on to humans, if you have any symptoms yourself such as an itchy rash, mention it to your vet and see your doctor.

## Whom do I contact if I want to know more?

If you have any questions about the management of pruritus or concerns about your dog's health, contact your own vet. They will know your dog's medical history and will be able to discuss your dog's health and care with you.



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