

## Feet and Bottom

Often times your pet's toenails may get overlooked. Many pet owners rely on the vet or groomer to trim their pet's nails. If you are unsure about doing this yourself, it is better to let someone who is trained trim the nails. Even so, you should periodically check your pet's feet for any problems. Toenails can easily become overgrown, which can lead to painful problems for your pet. Even cats' nails can grow too long, especially older cats. Nails that are too long can break off or get caught in the carpet. Dewclaws are the nail on the sides of the feet, and they can easily grow in a circular direction and become embedded into the skin. Be aware that some dogs also have dewclaws on their back feet that need to be trimmed. Broken and embedded toenails are very painful and can lead to serious infections that can even spread up into the pet's legs.

Pets that constantly lick or chew on their feet might have allergies. Walking on the grass, on carpet, or even floor cleaners can be irritating to your pet's feet. The moisture that accumulates on the feet from licking creates the ideal environment for a yeast infection (known as athlete's foot in humans). Yeast infections cause even more irritation and itching. Some helpful tips to alleviate "itchy feet" are: keep the hair trimmed short on the feet, and rinse with water and completely dry the feet at least once daily, especially after being outside. Topical medications can also be applied as directed by the veterinarian.



An area on your pet that most pet owners wish to avoid is under the tail. Although it isn't a pleasant subject, it should not be completely avoided. Pets have scent glands just inside their rectum called anal glands. Normally, these glands contain a smelly liquid in which a small amount is excreted when they have a bowel movement. However, sometimes the glands can get impacted, causing discomfort for your pet. They can also get infected and even rupture to the outside of your pet's bottom. Signs that your dog or cat may be having trouble with its anal glands are scooting, licking at the base of the tail, and a bad odor present. Some owners or groomers will periodically express the glands, which helps prevent an impaction, or excrete full glands that would otherwise be relieved on your carpet. If there is a problem with the glands, the pet should see the veterinarian for the proper treatment.

### Helpful tips to help your allergy pet

- Bathe your dog or cat every two weeks with a vet-recommended shampoo.
- Brush your pet gently on a regular basis. This will help distribute oils and will prevent matting or tangling that can also irritate skin. Also give Omega Fatty Acid Capsules to prevent skin dryness.
- Dust and vacuum your home often, but be sure to keep your pet out of the room until you are finished.
- Keep your pet indoors while you are mowing the lawn or during periods when there is a lot of pollen in the air.
- Change furnace and air filters frequently. If possible, run the air conditioner when it is hot, and use a dehumidifier to prevent the occurrence of allergy-irritating molds in your home.
- Use hypoallergenic soap to wash your pet's bedding. A lot of laundry detergents contain perfumes that can irritate your pet's skin. Try switching to unscented laundry soap when you are washing anything that comes in close contact with your pet.
- Have your pet examined by the veterinarian to determine the right allergy medication and to check for bacterial or yeast infections in the skin and ears. Talk with the veterinarian to see if allergy testing and immunotherapy may be right for your pet.



200 Eagle Nest Drive • Paducah, KY 42003

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Dr. LaNita Flanary

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# PET NEWS

## ON THE SURFACE

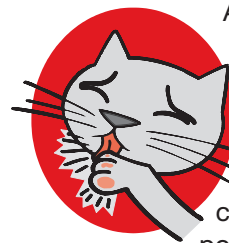
**Your pet's skin, allergies, ears and more!**

### Your Pet and Allergies

Allergies are probably the most common skin problem dogs and cats face. Human allergies usually consist of sneezing and watery eyes, while pets suffer with itching, skin irritations, and ear problems. Signs that may indicate a pet has allergies include scratching, hair loss, ear infections, chewing at the skin, and skin infections. Allergies can affect pets occasionally or year-round depending on what the allergen is. An allergen is what causes the allergic reaction, and there are three main allergen groups: food, fleas, and atopy.



Food allergies are one the least likely causes of allergies in dogs and cats. It is often confused with food intolerance. Food intolerance usually causes intestinal upset such as vomiting, diarrhea, and excessive gas. While a food allergen can also cause intestinal problems, they most commonly result in itching, skin inflammation, ear problems, and hair loss. Certain breeds appear to be more likely to develop food allergies and intolerances. These breeds include Siamese cats, West Highland Terriers, Cocker Spaniels, and Irish Setters. Specific ingredients in the pet's diet can cause an allergic reaction. Common food allergens are beef, corn, chicken, eggs, and wheat gluten. Special foods that omit the specified allergen or break down the protein molecules so that they do not trigger an allergic response are available through your veterinarian. The correct Hill's Science Diet or IVD food can be prescribed to pets suffering from food allergies.



An allergy to fleas is the most common type of animal allergy. Fleas are blood-sucking parasites that can live just about anywhere and multiply very fast. The reaction to the flea's saliva is flea allergy dermatitis, or FAD, and can cause severe itching. Just one bite from a flea can cause itching for up to three weeks. Just imagine, if one flea bite can do that, how miserable your pet could be with 50, 100, or more flea bites. Allergies to fleas cause scratching, chewing, and restlessness. This scratching and chewing can also lead to skin infections, which can be severe if left untreated. Fleas also spread tapeworms and can cause anemia, which is decreased red blood cells. Flea control is essential in preventing FAD. If a flea population gets out of hand, it can become difficult (but not impossible) to regain control, resulting in a very uncomfortable situation for your pet.

There are several types of flea control available. Be aware that many pets have reactions to over-the-counter flea products; however those available at veterinary clinics are proven to be the safest and most effective to use on your pet. Frontline Plus is a once-a-month product that breaks the life cycle of the flea by killing the adults, fleas, and larvae. Frontline Plus is available for dogs and cats and is also effective against ticks. Comfortis is a chewable tablet that is available for flea protection for dogs. It is also a once-a-month treatment and has demonstrated to be safe for dogs and puppies 14 weeks of age and older. It is very effective and starts killing fleas within 30 minutes of administration. Revolution is another option for flea control in pets that also protects against ticks, some intestinal worms, heartworms, and earmites. We recommend Revolution for cats.

The third category of pet allergies is called atopy. Atopy is essentially everything in the pet's environment. This includes pollens, mold, dust, insects, and even humans! Dogs can even be allergic to cats and vice versa. To precisely determine what your pet is allergic to, a blood sample can be taken from your pet and sent to a laboratory. This can be extremely helpful when treating your pet for allergies. Allergy testing is commonly done when a pet has chronic allergy problems or does not respond well to allergy medications, and the owner wishes to pursue immunotherapy as a treatment.

Not only do allergies cause itching for your pet, but they can lead to secondary problems, such as bacterial or yeast infections. A bacterial skin infection, also called pyoderma, is commonly associated with allergies. The most common bacteria involved is Staphylococcus, usually referred to as a Staph Infection. Irritated and inflamed skin is like an

open door for the pyoderma to start. Some bacteria is normally on the skin, and some are imbedded with scratching, but they can get out of control when the skin is irritated by allergies. This results in pustules, hair loss, pain, and more itching. It can take weeks or months to treat. Yeast infections can also be secondary to allergies and are especially common on the feet and in the ears, since these are places where moisture is often present. There are many different types of bacteria and yeast, and there are specific medications to treat certain ones. To accurately diagnose and treat a skin or ear infection, the veterinarian can swab or scrape an infected area and diagnose the culprits by examining the specimen under the microscope. This is important to know so that the correct and best medication can be used to treat the problem.

## Treatments and Relief for Your Allergy Pet

Finding relief for your allergic pet requires working with the veterinarian to decide on the best treatment option(s). There are several different approaches, and it depends on your pet's individual need as to which one will work best.



**Shampooing.** Occasional shampooing is good for your dog's skin and hair coat. Cats usually groom themselves, but may require a bath if they have a special need. Allergy pets can benefit from using medicated shampoos and conditioners. Your veterinarian can provide your pet with the right shampoo for its specific purpose. Using the wrong shampoo on your pet can actually do more harm than good. Some shampoos can actually irritate allergy skin even more, and human shampoo should never be used on a pet because human skin and your pet's skin are very different. Over-bathing can also be harmful. Unless your pet has a skin condition and requires frequent medicated baths, once every two weeks should be sufficient. Also, keeping your pet's coat brushed and free of mats is important.

Here are some tips on bathing your pet:

1. Always use warm water; be sure it is not too hot.
2. Apply a sufficient amount of shampoo to the top of the neck and along the back of the pet.
3. Work shampoo into a rich lather over the body, adding more water as necessary.
4. The face and ears should be washed with a sudsy washcloth to avoid getting shampoo and water into the ears and eyes.
5. Rinse shampoo thoroughly from your pet's coat until the water runs clear.
6. Repeat steps 2 through 4, and allow shampoo to set for 5 to 10 minutes, unless otherwise specified for a medicated shampoo.
7. Again, rinse thoroughly. If using a conditioner, be sure to follow directions carefully since some are to be rinsed out and others are leave-in.
8. Be sure to dry your pet with clean towels to avoid it getting chilled. You may use a hairdryer, but be cautious that it is not too close to the pet or too hot.



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**Medications and supplements.** There are different types of medications that are available through your veterinarian to treat allergies and skin problems for your pet. (Never use human medication or an over-the-counter product without consulting with the vet). Omega fatty acid supplements are good for healthy skin but can also benefit skin that is irritated by allergies. Medications such as antihistamines and steroids are used for many pets to provide allergy relief. These are best used for occasional or seasonal allergy problems. In a case where there is a localized area, such as just the feet, that is affected by allergies, a topical treatment may be prescribed.



**Immunotherapy.** Pets that have chronic allergies or those that do not respond well to medications may benefit from allergy testing and immunotherapy. The veterinarian can test your pet for allergies with a simple blood draw. The test will tell you specifically what the allergens are that are causing your pet to itch. Once you know what these allergens are, you can try to limit your pet's exposure to them; however, most environmental allergens are nearly impossible to avoid. Immunotherapy is a long-term treatment option that builds your pet's immunity to the specific allergens. The injections are specifically formulated for your individual pet based on the allergy tests. This option is highly effective for treating atopy but is not recommended for food or flea allergies.



## Ear Problems and Care

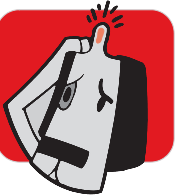
The first signs your pet may give you that there is a problem with the ears is scratching at them and shaking the head. The veterinarian should examine your pet's ear if you suspect that there is something wrong. It is very common for pets' ears to become inflamed, irritated, and infected, and it is often associated with allergies. Acute ear problems are those that have developed fairly quickly and are short-term, while chronic inflammation or infections develop over time and are prolonged. Whichever the case, the veterinarian can swab the ear canal and determine what the cause is. Whether it is bacterial, yeast, inflammation, or a combination, medication can be prescribed to treat the ears. When an animal has chronic and reoccurring ear infections, allergies may be considered and the veterinarian can treat accordingly.



Keeping your pet's ears clean is not only good hygiene for your pet, but it can also decrease the incidence of infection. For normal healthy ears, cleaning about every two weeks is sufficient. If your pet has infections or inflammation with or without allergies, you may need to clean more often. To properly clean the ear, apply the cleaning solution to the ear canal and gently massage the base of the ear. Wipe the ear with a gauze or paper towel. Never use a cotton tipped applicator in your pet's ears. Doing so can rupture the eardrum. Repeat until there is no wax buildup or dirt to wipe away. After the ears are cleaned, follow by applying a drying solution. Always follow the directions and use only a product that is recommended by the veterinarian.

## Lumps and Bumps

Just as with humans, pets can develop lumps and bumps on their skin, too. These should always be examined by the veterinarian since it could be serious. Skin cancer is the number one cancer in dogs and this concern includes a variety of malignant tumors. There are also possibilities that are not as serious, such as cysts, skin tags, or benign growths. If you or your veterinarian discovers a growth on your pet, the vet will need to test to determine exactly what it is. This can be done two ways: a nodule or small growth on the skin will most likely be removed and sent to the laboratory for testing. A larger, more involved lump on the skin may also be removed, but the vet may do a biopsy first by removing a tiny amount of the growth tissue using a needle. It cannot be determined whether a skin growth is malignant or benign without testing. Malignant growths are resistant to treatment and tend to become worse with their destructive growth. Benign growths are less invasive and do not destroy adjacent tissue. In either case, the smaller the growth is discovered and checked by the veterinarian, the better the prognosis.



## Pet's With Hair Loss

Hair loss in pets is not normal, even when they get older. If you notice thinning or balding spots on your pet, it should be checked by the veterinarian to determine the cause. You should observe your dog or cat to see if there is itching associated with the hair loss. If the pet has been scratching, resulting in balding areas, there are several possible causes. Allergies and parasites are the two main culprits. Other parasites, such as mange mites, are also common. There are two types of mange mites, usually found on dogs: sarcoptic and demodectic. Sarcoptic mites are very itchy and can be spread from dog to dog directly or in the environment. The treatment for sarcoptes used to be stinky dips. These can still be used, but now it can be treated more easily with two or three injections given by the veterinarian.

Demodectic mange mites are passed only from a mother dog to her puppies just after they are born. This type of mite does not cause itching. A small number of this microscopic mite is actually normal on the dog's skin, but genetically the dog's immune system cannot keep them in control. It causes hair loss, usually starting on the legs and face then spreading over the whole body. Left untreated, skin infections can develop in which, in severe cases, are life-threatening. Several treatment options are available through the vet including a bathing and dipping regimen, daily oral medication, and a topical once-monthly flea control product called Promeris. Depending on the severity of the case and whether it is recurrent, the veterinarian can determine the best treatment for your pet. Most dogs that have Demodicosis can be treated with success, but some have breakouts from time to time, especially during stress. These dogs should not be bred. They should be neutered or spayed, since it is genetic and their own hormones can also cause a reoccurrence.

Another reason for hair loss, mostly in older dogs, is hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism is a condition in which the thyroid gland does not function as it should. This results in hair loss, dry and brittle hair, weight gain although not eating much, and decreased energy levels. It can really take a toll on the dog's overall health. Testing can easily be done in the veterinary clinic with a blood sample. If it is determined the dog is hypothyroid, daily medication can be given to correct it. The dog's thyroid levels should be rechecked yearly to see whether or not the medication dosage needs to be altered.

