

Skin and coat

The Importance of Dog Grooming and Canine Skin Care Your dog's coat reflects his general health, so help maintain it!

The shine of your dog's coat (or lack thereof) is a good indication of the overall health of your dog. Dull or brittle hair can be caused by a dietary imbalance, or it may be due to diseases of digestive, hepatic, renal, thyroidal, immune, or parasitic origin. Alterations of hair typically appear rather late in the course of the disease, as hair growth is rather slow; it usually takes at least four weeks of disease progress before changes are noticeable in the hair. And it typically takes four or more weeks before a dietary supplement will have any positive effects on the quality of the hair.

Hair loss in dogs

The common causes of hair loss in dogs are:

• Flea-associated dermatitis

A dog with flea infestation typically has a brittle, broken hair coat, especially in the area just in front of the tail head where fleas prefer to reside. Natural flea control always involves a multi-pronged approach. It's been estimated that less than 10 percent of a given population of fleas are found on the resident dog at any given time. Killing the fleas on the dog, then, is actually a small part of the job! The bigger task involves removing larvae and pupae from your dog's home and eliminating places where the flea eggs can develop.

• Canine atopy

This is an allergic itching syndrome along with subsequent loss of hair that is thought to be genetic in origin. Natural care will involve enhancing the immune system with herbs, supplements, and perhaps acupuncture. Natural anti-itch and antianxiety herbal remedies, acupuncture, or homeopathic therapy may also be helpful.

• Pyotraumatic dermatitis (hot spots)

Hot spots involve intense itching in one or two isolated area of the trunk or limbs of the body. The involved areas may become inflamed and raw within a matter of hours. Stress may be a factor in its onset. Herbal immune system enhancers like echinacea can help, as can topical application of calendula and acupuncture.

• Mange

Demodectic mange is caused when a parasite, *Demodex canis*, which lives a natural life in the hair and oil glands of the skin of most healthy dogs, starts multiplying rapidly. This tends to occur in young animals with an unhealthy immune system. It may have a genetic basis, as it tends to run in certain lines of dogs and seems to be more common in certain breeds. It doesn't cause itching, but the involved areas are subject to secondary bacterial infection. A good bet is to rebalance the immune system with herbs such as echinacea, antioxidants, and sometimes acupuncture.

Sarcoptic mange is due to a transmissible parasite that burrows through the layers of the skin causing intense itching. It passes from pet to pet through contact, and can pass to humans, too. Sarcoptic mange is primarily a disease of the immune system, treatable with herbs such as echinacea, antioxidants, and possibly acupuncture to help balance the immune system. Topical herbal remedies can help decrease infections and minimize parasite numbers. Topical and internal anti-itch remedies may also help.

• Ringworm

Ringworm is a fungal disease that creates a round or oval non-itchy area of hair loss. Hair is lost because the fungus weakens the hair shaft and causes it to break off. Some cases of ringworm respond to herbal topical remedies such as goldenseal, calendula, myrrh, or thuja along with internal herbs such as echinacea, cleavers, and yellow dock. Iodine preparations, used topically, may also be helpful, and once again, energizing the immune system may be beneficial.

• Stress-induced dermatitis

This "disease" typically affects "Nervous Nellies" who cannot sit still. Affected dogs simply chew on themselves if they can't find anything else interesting to do. The primary cure for this condition is to provide plenty of exercise and plenty of challenging tasks for the dog to do. Training games, food-dispensing toys, and frequent changes of activity can help distract and engage the dog in more healthful patterns. Flower essences may also be helpful when they are matched to the personality of the dog. Many of these dogs have an itch caused by a misaligned vertebrae and they chew or dig at it. Chiropractic adjustments have helped a lot of

these animals.

• **Food allergies**

While food allergies may be the cause of some itchy dogs, research would indicate that skin cases are not often related to food allergies. In dogs, the primary signs of food allergies are most often related to gastrointestinal upset. When we get the gut back into balance, the animal no longer has a problem with food allergies of any kind.

• **Miscellaneous conditions**

Pyoderma, excessive numbers of bacteria in the hair follicle, may cause circular areas of alopecia or generalized excessive shedding. Natural treatment for pyoderma includes the use of topical and oral herbal remedies with antibiotic activity. Some breeds, like the Chow-Chow, may have an arrest in the hair growth after clipping. This resolves spontaneously after several months of a lack of hair regrowth.

Many diseases are associated with hair cycle abnormalities, including endocrine diseases such as hypothyroidism and Cushing's syndrome; hereditary alopecia and hypotrichosis (the presence of less than normal amounts of hair); and familial zinc-responsive dermatopathy.

Some ideas to keep in mind for healthy skin and coat:

- Use natural, chemical-free shampoos like Keys and Spa Diggity Dog products. You can ask for these to be used in the WagVille grooming shop.
- Reenergizing the immune system with herbal remedies, antioxidants, and essential fatty acids like salmon oil.
- Attention to diet, including making sure that all nutrients, especially vitamins and minerals, are balanced. Many holistic practitioners have found that simply adding raw meat to the diet (beginning with about 1 teaspoonful per 20 pounds of the dog's body weight and gradually building up to about a quarter to a third of the total diet) will be the best skin and hair coat "medicine" money can buy.
- Chiropractic adjustments may work.
- Specific natural remedies when indicated, for instance flower essences and/or calming herbs to calm the nervous beast, topical herbals for itch control and faster healing, and acupuncture or homeopathy when indicated.