

# Creating an Allergy-Free Life for You and Your Dog



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## Introduction

Owning a dog means having a constant companion with which you can bond and play. Aside from the joy and laughter that a dog can bring to your relationship, he can also bring health problems that are a great source of discomfort for both of you. One of the most common health problems that dogs experience is that of allergies.

The occurrence of allergies in dogs seems to be trending upwards, and many theories as to why this is happening have been proposed. The same air, water, and food which are necessary for your dog's survival may also be polluted with toxins which are causing allergic reactions.

Other dog experts suggest that, especially in purebred dogs, the vulnerability to allergies is a consequence of weakened immune systems. But regardless of why it is happening, the number of dogs who suffer from frequent allergies is climbing, and the number of dog owners who are at their wit's end to find a way to relieve their pets' suffering is higher than ever.

If your beloved canine pal has begun to develop an allergy, you'll know by his or her behavior, and you'll need to figure out what is causing the problem so you can eliminate it. But you'll also need to have some way of treating the symptoms of allergic reaction until they subside, because until you do your poor pet will be crazy with discomfort.

This E-book is our way of trying to help all the dogs and dog lovers whose lives have been taken over by an allergy. We hope it will bring both you and your pet the relief you so richly deserve!

# Chapter One: What Are Dog Allergies?

Allergies, both in humans and dogs, occur when the immune system reacts improperly a harmless foreign substance like dust or pollen. The substance causing the immune system to go haywire is referred to as an allergen.

Because the in the number of dogs which experience allergic reactions is continuing to grow, many experts, as we mentioned in the Introduction, think that impaired immune systems may be responsible. There are, however, three factors which must be involved before your dog actually starts showing signs of an allergic reaction. They are:

## Exposure to the allergen

An allergen can be an inhaled substance like pollen, to a chemical spray (or even your air freshener) to cigarette smoke (another reason to quit) to your household cleaning products. Flea saliva is also extremely common allergens for dogs, as are several ingredients commonly found in both wet and dry commercial dog foods. We'll discuss the most common dog allergens in greater detail later on.

## Mast Cells

Your dog's mast cells are most heavily concentrated in his or her upper respiratory tract, lungs, nose, and the connective tissues of the skin.

## Immunoglobulin E (IgE)

IgE is an antibody which the immune system produces when it is mounting an attack against a harmful foreign substance. IgE circulates through the dog's body and forms a coating on his or her mast cells.

The presence of the IgE signals the mast cells to release the histamines which cause your dog to sneeze, itch, and have difficulty breathing. In rare cases, a highly sensitive dog may go into a state of anaphylactic shock after receiving an insect bite or sting, and will experience spreading hives, diarrhea or vomiting, and great difficulty in breathing.

Any symptoms of allergy demand immediate attention from your vet, because allergies left untreated will take an inevitable toll on your pet's immune system, making it even more sensitive. Your dog's single allergy can multiply into dozens if it's not addressed right away!

## **Chapter Two: 6 Common Symptoms of Dog Allergies**

Dogs exhibit different signs as a result of having allergies. Here are six of the most common symptoms to watch for:

### **1. Skin Problems**

The most obvious sign of skin problems is when your dog itches—more than normal—for an extended period of time. This excessive itching is dangerous because pustules can erupt and become infected. You may also notice redness and swelling of the problem area. If he has fleas, then the allergy situation can become more severe.

### **2. Hair Loss**

If your dog loses an excessive amount of hair, he could possibly have allergies.

### **3. Digestive Problems**

Excessive diarrhea and/or gas is a sign that your dog could have allergies.

### **4. Vomiting**

If your dog vomits, it could be due to stomach and intestinal problems caused by allergies.

### **5. Foul Odors**

If you notice foul smelling odors, they are most likely due to infections in open sores on the skin.

### **6. Ear Infections**

Scratching or tilting of the head can be signs of an ear infection caused by allergies.

Pay close attention to your dog's behaviors—and the duration of his or her "episodes." These could be important clues to determining your dog's health problems.



## Chapter Three: Dog Allergy Causes

If your dog shows signs of allergic reaction, you need to find out what is causing it. A veterinarian can help you verify the problem and then help you determine how to resolve it and strengthen his immune system.

Dogs can react differently to allergies, even those allergies caused by the same allergen. These allergens can at times be in the dog's body, causing it to react against itself, as in the case of auto-immune diseases. Auto-immune allergies are both chronic and especially serious.

Some dog breeds may seem less susceptible to allergies than others, but the reality is that all dogs, whether purebreds or mixed breeds, are vulnerable to allergies from a wide variety of causes. Among the breeds which are most prone to allergies are:

- ✚ Beagle
- ✚ Bichon Frise
- ✚ Boxer
- ✚ Boston Terrier
- ✚ Dalmatian
- ✚ Golden Retriever
- ✚ German Shepherd
- ✚ Miniature Schnauzer
- ✚ Poodle
- ✚ Pug
- ✚ Fox Terrier
- ✚ West Highland Terrier

Westies seem to be even more vulnerable to allergies than other breeds.

Dog allergies can be grouped into three major categories:

- ✚ Inhalant Allergies
- ✚ Flea Allergies
- ✚ Food Allergies

## **Inhalant Allergies**

Inhalant allergies are far and away the most common of all canine allergies, simply because the number of potential allergens circulating in the air your dog breathes borders on the infinite.

Industrial air pollution can be a real problem for city dogs, but country dogs don't fare much better with their exposure to trees, grass, pollen, mold, and the garden chemicals used to keep insects controlled.

Indoor dogs have to cope with household chemicals, cigarette smoke, and even the air fresheners used to cover up the cigarette smoke. They also breathe in fibers from the synthetic carpets beneath their paws.

Although Mother Nature designed your pet's immune system to neutralize the bad stuff out of the air he or she breathes, you may have a dog with an overenthusiastic immune system which goes into overdrive when it can't neutralize a substance and starts producing the histamines which lead to inflammation, sneezing, wheezing, watery eyes, and itching.

When your dog has breathed in something which triggers its allergic response, you'll see symptoms like scratching and biting; paw-licking; or even rubbing his or her face on a patch of dirt to relieve the itchy eyes.

Some of these inhalant allergies, however, are seasonal. Some dogs, for example, may deal with grass pollen only in the spring and summer. Ragweed pollen, on the other hand, could be a problem in late summer and early fall. But allergies resulting from exposure to indoor substances will continue all year long unless the allergens causing them are identified and eliminated.

## **Flea Allergies**

The most common cause of allergic skin inflammation, or dermatitis, in dogs is an allergy to flea saliva. Allergic dermatitis caused by fleas will result in skin which itches so severely that your dog will chew and scratches at his or her rump and sides until they are raw. If left untreated, your dog will soon be bald in those areas, and have oozing bleeding skin.

A flea allergy, unfortunately, can occur from a single flea bite, so if your dog exhibits this type of allergy it's essential that you not only kill the fleas which are on your dog, but exterminate all the fleas, flea larvae, and flea eggs which are undoubtedly present in your home.

If your dog has started scratching, you can determine if fleas are responsible by looking for coppery-colored specks hopping along on top of his or her skin. Fleas, however, are sensitive to light and you may have to turn your dog belly-up to search for the insects hiding among the stomach fur. If they're not there, they'll almost certainly be in the skin at the base of your dog's tail.

Flea "dirt," or droppings, resembles pepper sprinkled on the surface of a dog's skin, and you can tell whether it's flea dirt or just regular dirt by removing some with a damp paper towel. Leave it for two or three minutes, and if it begins to pool into a tiny puddle, it's flea dirt.

## **Food Allergies**

If your dog shows signs of allergies, but you are quite certain it is not from inhalants in the environment, fleas in his coat or other health problems, your dog could suffer from food allergies.

If, for example, your dog has been eating one particular food or a favorite treat for several months or even years, he or she might have developed an intolerance for one of the ingredients in that food. Your dog can go for months or even years eating the same food with no problem, but over time his or her immune system will be accumulating enough antibodies to finally result in an allergic reaction. If your dog has a bad reaction to a food the first time he or she eats it, this is a food intolerance caused by a toxin in the food (and there are, unfortunately, more of them than you'd like to think) but it's not an allergic reaction.

What food ingredients will cause an allergic reaction in your pet? A great many dogs are allergic, surprisingly enough, to beef and dairy products (perhaps because of the hormones or antibiotics used on commercial beef and dairy herds?) Wheat is another common allergen found in dog food, and the trio of beef, dairy products, and wheat account for a whopping 68% of the food allergies in dogs!

While it's natural to think that if your dog has a food allergy, he or she will exhibit indigestion like nausea or diarrhea, almost all canine food allergies cause severely itching skin, and dogs with food allergies very often chew incessantly at their legs and paws. If your dog has intestinal distress after a meal, you are almost certainly looking at food intolerance and not an allergy.



The difficulty in diagnosing food allergies in dogs is that most dogs who are allergic will suffer from more than one allergy at a time. So even if you were to attempt to diagnose your dog's food allergy by changing his or her diet, and your dog began experiencing the itching skin of a flea allergy, you might mistakenly think the change of diet was ineffective in treating the food allergy.

The only way to determine the change in diet has been effective is to eliminate all other possible causes for your dog's symptoms, and put your pet on what is known as an "elimination trial" diet. You will feed your dog a diet which consists of a single protein and a single carbohydrate which you have never fed before, and water, for between two and three months. Because a food allergy takes months or years to develop, your dog will not be allergic to the new foods and should not become allergic to them in that amount of time.

Your vet may either recommend a commercial food which will suit the purposes of your elimination trial diet, or may suggest that you prepare your dog's food at home. While your dog is on the elimination diet, you'll have to be disciplined enough to avoid feeding treats or table scraps, and take away the chew toys. If there are other dogs around, keep your pet away from their droppings. Some dogs will nibble on other dogs' waste, and even that will be enough to invalidate your elimination trial diet.

If your dog's symptoms are seriously improved after two or three months on the elimination trial diet, you'll know that a food allergy was causing them. If they haven't improved, or have worsened, you'll have to look elsewhere for their cause, but you can let your pet return to the old way of eating.

One precaution: if you decide to make your dog's elimination trial diet yourself, it won't be fortified with the essential vitamins, trace minerals, and fatty acids necessary to maintain your pet's health. So

you'll have to get supplements and add them to the food before feeding your pet.

We'll now look at the treatments for the three different types of dog allergies.

## **Chapter Four: Treating and Preventing Dog Allergies**

### **Treating Inhalant Allergies**

You can treat your dog's inhalant allergies by giving him or her cool baths with shampoos or rinses containing aloe vera, eucalyptus, or oatmeal. These ingredients will both soothe your pet's skin and promote its healing when the allergen causing the condition has been removed.

In an extreme case of inhalant allergy, your vet may suggest an antibiotic drug therapy treatment, or both. Your vet may even suggest treating your pet with an over-the-counter antihistamine formulated for humans, like diphenhydramine (Benadryl), clemastine (Tavist), or chlorpheniramine (Chlortrimeton). But you should be very careful to follow your vet's instructions concerning dosage when giving one of these medications to your dog.

If all other treatment options seem to have failed, your vet may prescribe prednisone or a similar steroid to relieve your dog's inhalant allergy symptoms. But prolonged use of steroids can wreak havoc on the animal's liver, and may even, in an older dog, cause Cushing's disease. Steroid use is a treatment of last resort.

If your vet does prescribe steroids for your dog, you can expect your pet to be both hungrier and thirstier, and to need more walks because of the extra water he or she drinks. You may also notice that the steroids are making your dog more aggressive.

### **Preventing Inhalant Allergies**

One way to raise your dog's resistance to inhalant allergies is to add more essential fatty acids (Omega 3 and Omega 6) to his or her diet. Including cold-pressed, pure vegetable oils like flax seed,



sunflower, or wheat germ oil in your dog's food may spell the end of that of itching and flaking skin, thanks to the linolenic and linoleic acids which the fatty acids in these oils contain.

Most dogs enjoy the taste of these oils but for those who don't, cold-water fish based oil like that of salmon or mackerel will work just as well.

The fatty acids will not only help relieve your dog's itching; they'll help keep his or her cell membranes, organs (the skin is the largest organ, by the way), muscles, and nerves healthy so that you dog doesn't develop problems like high blood pressure and heart disease on top of the inhalant allergy.

You can also make sure your dog's diet contains plenty of the essential vitamins and minerals, in particular antioxidants like Vitamins A, C and E, and the mineral selenium. All of these nutrients are necessary to maintain your dog's health and keep his or her skin and coat in prime condition.

Finally, all the treatment and nutritious food in the world won't be of much use unless you keep your home—and especially the areas of the house where your dog spends most of his time—very clean. Vacuum the floors and furniture frequently and dust *everything*. Also make sure that you keep his or bedding clean and fresh at all times.

Even if you go this route, it is important to point out that your dog's allergies may not fully disappear. Therefore, you may have to experiment to find the solution that works for him or her.

## **Treating Flea Allergies**

The best way to help your dog avoid a flea allergy is to groom him or her regularly. You can also keep your dog's coat trimmed closely so that any fleas or flea dirt will be easy to spot.

Also be sure to regularly apply flea prevention treatment to your dog. Your veterinarian will have a good supply of high-quality flea products. Flea prevention treatments range from once-a-month treatments, pills, sprays, and shampoos.

## Preventing Flea Allergies

Using grooming and flea prevention treatment are important. Of course, but they won't do much good unless you also destroy all the fleas in your dog's environment, and this includes their larvae and eggs. Your vet can provide you with a premise fogger that contains growth regulators and pyrethrins.

A word of caution: Don't let price be a factor in your flea prevention decision. The better flea preventative products are usually more expensive, but they are much more effective.

Many dog owners prefer to go the "natural" route in preventing fleas by using plant products such as garlic and brewer's yeast. However, there is no solid proof that these actually deter fleas.

Some dog owners surround the dog crate or doorways with herbs such as southernwood, pennyroyal, or wormwood. Others swear by herbal flea collars.

Then there are dog owners who brush lavender or eucalyptus oil throughout the dog's coat—usually weekly; they may also sprinkle rosemary, dried lavender leaves, or eucalyptus into the dog's bed.

While these are all safe and resourceful ideas, it is not known for certain if they can really prevent fleas. If your dog shows signs of irritated skin, you can follow the tips for shampooing, diet changes, and cleaning as described above in the Inhalant Allergies section above.

## Treating Food Allergies

If you suspect that your dog is showing symptoms of a food allergy, a trip to the vet is certainly in order. The only way to determine if your dog is suffering from a food, or some other kind of allergy, is to change his or her diet, especially if you have been giving your pet that same food and treats for an extended period.

If the elimination trial diet we mentioned above proves that your dog does have a food allergy, the natural treatment will be to simply permanently keep the dog off the foods which originally triggered the



allergy. But you'll now be able to expand your dog's foods beyond the single protein and whole grain which constituted the elimination trial diet, and it probably can't happen soon enough for your pooch!

As we mentioned above, beef, dairy products, and wheat account for nearly seven of every ten food allergies in dogs, so examine the label of every commercial food you are giving your pet for all of those products and eliminate them from the daily menu. Look instead for commercial dog foods with, fish, lamb, liver, or even game meat like venison, and try to find organic dog food if you can. Organic dog food has ingredients grown or raised with no artificial hormones, antibiotics, or chemical pesticides and herbicides.

Your vet may suggest, if your dog belongs to a breed susceptible to developing food allergies, that you start preparing your dog's meals yourself including one of the above sources of protein mixed with either brown rice or potatoes and veggies (yes, veggies) and boiled. You can make a large batch of this food and divide it into individual portions which can be frozen and thawed before each meal.

While different nutritional experts will argue about the proper ration of proteins, whole grains, and vegetables your dog needs, a ballpark estimate would be that it should contain a maximum of 50% whole grains which have either been steamed or boiled, while protein from meat sources and veggies should both weigh in at around 25%.

If you intend to continue feeding your dog commercial food, check its label and make sure that the protein it contains comes from a decent source of meat, and not that mysterious compound known as "meat by-products," which can be anything from hooves to beaks and feathers.

## **Alternative Methods of Treating Food Allergy Symptoms**

You can also, while you're waiting to determine if your dog's allergy is caused by food, use some natural methods to relieve those symptoms.

### **Vitamin C**

Vitamin C is a natural antihistamine, and will relieve your' dog's itching.

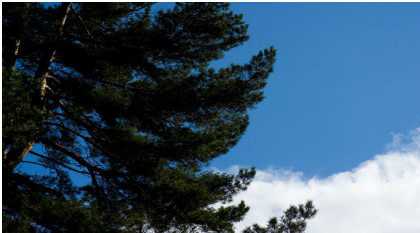
You probably know that Vitamin C is also referred to as "The Sunshine Vitamin," and that you get your daily allotment of it in your morning orange or grapefruit juice. But persuading your dog to do down a glass of OJ every morning might be a challenge, so you can simply buy a liquid form of Vitamin C and add the appropriate dosage to doggie's daily rations.



## MSM

MSM, or methylsulfonyl methane, is an organic form of sulfur which will soften the cells of your dog's skin so they become more permeable and the toxins which may be triggering your dog's allergy are flushed from them more easily.

While your dog may prefer to save pine trees for another use, dietary MSM is extracted from the lignin of pine trees. Lignin is found in the tree's cell walls.



You can also add lentils to your dog's diet if you are making his or her food your self; lentils are an excellent source of MSM.

## Quercetin and Bromelain



Quercetin is a bioflavonoid and bromelain is an enzyme found in fresh pineapple, and in combination they will prevent your dog's digestive system from releasing histamines which can cause an allergic reaction.

## Preventing Food Allergies In Your Dog

There is really no way to guarantee your dog won't, sooner or later, develop a food allergy, because food allergies take so long to show up that you might be thinking everything is just fine. Your pet will be cleaning his or her dish and begging for treats, and then one day something in the food will trigger the itching skin, upset stomach, and general misery.

The best hope you have of preventing a food allergy in your dog is to simply avoid having the most likely allergens like beef, wheat, soy, eggs, and dairy products, and artificial colors and preservatives in doggie's diet from Day One. Your dog won't miss what he or she has never had, but keeping the culprits away from your pet will require a commitment from everyone in your household. If you have more than one dog (or even a cat) you'll have to feed them separately and clean up the leftovers as soon as mealtime is over.

Now that we've examined what allergies can do to your dog, and what you can do to both treat and prevent them, we'll turn to the allergies that living with a dog can bring to your life, and how you can cope with them so that you and doggie can continue to live in comfortable companionship for a very long time!

## Chapter Five: When You Are Allergic To Your Dog

Approximately 15 percent of dog owners suffer from some sort of pet-related allergies. These allergic reactions can be mild or quite severe. Allergies can be caused by dander, saliva, skin or hair proteins, or fur.

How do these allergies affect the body? People can develop an immune reaction to a particular protein that is found in the sebaceous glands of the dog's skin.

Dogs are continually shedding, so when he releases these tiny scales of dead skin—dander—allergens are also being released.

A dog can also have allergens in his saliva and even urine. These allergens get trapped into his fur and when he licks himself, he is spreading them.

Additionally, as the fur dries out, there are microscopic particles that flake off and get into the air. When this happens, you can breathe in the particles.

These allergens can stay airborne for hours at a time and can stay potent for weeks—making it very uncomfortable for you.

### Symptoms of Allergies

If you find yourself sneezing and wheezing, or you discover itchy rashes, chances are you have allergies. If this is the case, you will want to consult with an allergist. He or she will be able to determine if your allergy symptoms are pet-related.

If you find that you are allergic to your dog, the allergist can help alleviate the irritating symptoms by creating a treatment routine. This could include medication, allergy shots, and/or alternative therapy.



## **15 Helpful Tips for Controlling Allergies**

Unfortunately, there is not a cure for allergies. However, there are several things you can do to make life with your dog more comfortable:

### **1. Wash your hands frequently.**

Wash your hands with soap and hot water immediately after handling your dog. If you are unable to wash your hands right away, avoid touching your hands with your face—especially your eyes, nose, and mouth.

If you have severe allergies and are in close contact with your dog, you may need to take frequent showers and change your clothes throughout the day.

### **2. Feed your dog a well-balanced diet.**

Your dog's diet should include some natural fat. This fat helps to make your dog's skin less dry, resulting in less shedding. Talk to your vet about his recommendations on how to safely add fat to his diet.

### **3. Don't allow your dog in the bedroom.**

This tip takes a lot of discipline, but it does make a big impact on your reaction to allergies. Keeping your bedroom door closed is ideal because it keeps airborne particles away.

Sleep on mattresses and pillows with hypoallergenic polyester fillings. Also, as an extra precaution, cover your pillows, mattresses, and box springs with plastic, zippered, allergy-proof covers.

### **4. Brush your dog often.**

It is ideal to brush your dog daily. However, if you suffer from allergies, you'll need to give another family member the responsibility of brushing the dog. If possible, the dog should be brushed outdoors.

If you live alone with your dog, consider taking him to a professional groomer. You could wear a dust mask and gloves for brushing him in between grooming visits.

### **5. Bathe your dog often.**

Check your dog's current shampoo. It should be a hypoallergenic or oatmeal-based shampoo. If it's not, try switching brands.

If your allergies can't handle the bathing, have another family member be responsible for giving baths. Or, have your dog visit a groomer.

### **6. Wash your dog's belongings.**

Get into the habit of washing your dog's bed, blankets, and toys on a weekly basis—either by hand with a safe soap or in the washing machine.

### **7. Check your vacuum.**

Make sure your vacuum cleaner has a HEPA (High Efficiency Particle Air) filtration system. This type of system will help pull up and trap more of your dog's dander from the floor.

Note: vacuuming is recommended over sweeping because sweeping can stir the dander into the air, rather than trapping and removing it.

### **8. Have carpets cleaned regularly.**

Even though you use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filtration system, it is important to still have your carpets steam-cleaned throughout the year. Try to have this done at least quarterly.

### **9. Dust often.**

Use a damp cloth to wipe down surfaces such as tables, shelves, windowsills, wall hangings, lamps, and other furniture and accessories. If necessary, wear a dust mask as you clean.

### **10. Keep the air fresh.**

Use an air purifier one that contains a HEPA. This type of system will help eliminate dander from the air.

### **11. Wash walls often.**

Wipe down your walls, baseboards, and wall accessories. Do this according to how severe your allergies are.

### **12. Stay away from heavy upholstered furniture and curtains.**

These heavy materials can attract tiny allergens and trap them. If you have these heavy fabrics, be sure to vacuum them often. For curtains and pillows, have them professionally dry cleaned.

### **13. Change filters often.**

Replacing air filters for central heating and cooling systems, the furnace, and humidifiers can help control and remove allergies.

### **14. Circulate the air.**

Use exhaust fans and open the windows and doors to keep the home well-ventilated.

### **15. Don't smoke.**

If you smoke, you are not only lowering your tolerance to the allergens in your home, but you are also aggravating your lungs that are already sensitive.

## Recommended Breeds for Allergy Sufferers

If you suffer from allergies, there are some dog breeds that will be less problematic for you.

Keep in mind though, that all dogs produce dander. Depending on the breed, some dogs shed their skin as often as every few days, while others shed every few weeks.

The less a dog sheds the less dander it produces. The following breeds typically produce less dander:

- Airedale
- Basenji
- Bedlington terrier
- Bichon Frise
- Chinese crested
- Irish water spaniel
- Italian greyhound
- Kerry blue terrier
- Maltese
- Bichon Frise
- Portuguese water dog
- Schnauzers
- Shih tzu
- Soft-coated Wheaten terrier
- Tibetan terrier
- Wire-haired fox terrier
- Xoloitzcuintli (Mexican hairless)

## Conclusion

There are few joys in life as great as the joys of owning a happy, healthy, and loving dog whose greatest pleasure is the pleasure of your company. But a dog waylaid by allergies, be they from inhaled substances, fleas, or the food he or she eats, is a dog who simply can't be the companion Mother Nature intended him or her to be.

And there are few things more difficult in life for a dog owner who has become deeply attached to a dog to have to give that pet up because



of his or her own allergy. Dog allergies, and the allergic reactions which dogs cause in people, however, are a reality.

But with careful observation of your pet, an understanding of what causes dog allergies and what symptoms they cause, and a willingness to do what it takes to relieve your pet's suffering while you find and eliminate the allergens causing it, you can restore your life with your dog to everything it should be.

And by keeping your home clean and observing regular personal hygiene routines after you have been handling your pet, you can minimize your own allergic reactions to your dog.

I wish you, and your four-legged friend, all the best!

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