



Itchy Pet? Fall Allergies Might Be to Blame

By Andrea Vardaro Tucker, ELS

If you have seasonal allergies, you're probably used to investing in a few extra boxes of tissues as fall approaches to keep your itchy, runny eyes and nose in check. But just because your dog or cat isn't blowing her snout doesn't mean she's not suffering along with you. For pets, allergies often run skin deep. Learn what signs to look for and how to help your pet get relief.

SIGNS OF SEASONAL ALLERGIES

Seasonal allergies in pets look a little different than those in people. Although some pets sneeze or have itchy eyes or runny noses, most pets show signs of allergies on their skin in the form of scratching, chewing, rubbing, or other behaviors associated with itching. This type of allergy in pets is called *atopic dermatitis*, or *atopy*.

Pets' allergies tend to manifest on their skin because "allergens are absorbed through the skin and inhaled," says Dr. Robert Allen Kennis, a board-certified veterinary dermatologist and dermatology professor at Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine. He explains, "The reactive cells of skin are

abundant near external openings to the body, such as the nose and mouth. The same cells are abundant in the feet, where there is a lot of contact with the environment."

Once a pet's skin is irritated, *pruritus*, the itchiness that comes along with atopy, can develop on the face, feet, ears, underarms, forelegs, or belly and result in the following behaviors and signs:

- Scratching, licking, biting, or chewing of the skin
- Constant feet licking or "cleaning" (to relieve itching)
- Head shaking
- Rolling on the ground
- Red skin, inflammation, and sometimes hives

- Hair loss
- Fur stained brown from saliva (especially in dogs with a white coat)
- Recurrent secondary skin and ear infections

These signs can appear in both cats and dogs, but our feline friends typically experience allergies differently than their canine counterparts. See the sidebar for cat allergy specifics.

Sometimes another illness or type of allergy (like a food allergy or flea infestation) can result in similar signs. Your veterinarian will take your pet's history and all clinical signs into account when evaluating your pet for seasonal allergies or another culprit.

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Is Your Dog More at Risk for Allergies?

Certain dog breeds are more susceptible to seasonal allergies. Although any breed or mixed breed can develop these allergies, be on alert if you have a:

- > Terrier
- > Bulldog
- > Labrador or Golden Retriever
- > Maltese

TREATMENT OF SEASONAL ALLERGIES

Some pets just have mild itching and might not need any treatment. But if you suspect atopy is impacting your pet's quality of life—or if you notice a foul odor coming from her ears or skin, indicating possible infection—contact your veterinarian to examine your pet and develop an individualized treatment plan based on her signs.

According to Dr. Kennis, if your pet shows signs of allergies exclusively during the fall, she may only need treatment then, whereas pets with signs throughout the year may need ongoing therapy. In that case, your dog or cat's veterinarian may recommend allergy testing to determine your pet's most potent triggers and tailor treatment to those allergens.

Your veterinarian has many options for effectively treating your pet's seasonal allergies.

You can't do much to prevent seasonal allergies in a pet genetically predisposed to atopy, but you can take some common-sense approaches to potentially lessen their effect. Dr. Kennis advises pet parents to:

- Close windows in the car and at home.
- Try using an air purifier in your house.
- Keep your cat inside if possible, and reduce your dog's time outdoors.
- Walk your dog very early in the morning (ideally before sunrise), in late afternoon, or after sunset to help avoid the worst pollen.
- Wash your pet's feet with warm

water when she comes in from outside to help remove pollen and other potentially allergenic debris (and dry her feet thoroughly with a towel or microfiber cloth).

Schedule a visit to find out what your vet recommends to help your pet get relief.

Autumnal allergies don't have to make your pet miserable. Know what seasonal allergies look like in pets, and turn to your pet's veterinarian for the best way to treat your furry friend's signs.

Andrea Vardaro Tucker is a board-certified editor in the life sciences and copyeditor for HealthyPet. She and her family know it's fall when their 8-year-old West Highland White Terrier starts reverse sneezing frequently.



Feline Allergy Fundamentals



Seasonal allergies in cats are less common than in dogs and can be difficult to identify. Some of the signs in cats include:

- Constant grooming
- Symmetric hair loss and fur plucking
- Excessive waxy discharge from the ears
- Skin lesions

Consult your veterinarian if you suspect your feline friend has allergies. Signs of atopy could indicate the presence of other types of allergies or serious conditions that your vet will need to rule out before beginning treatment.