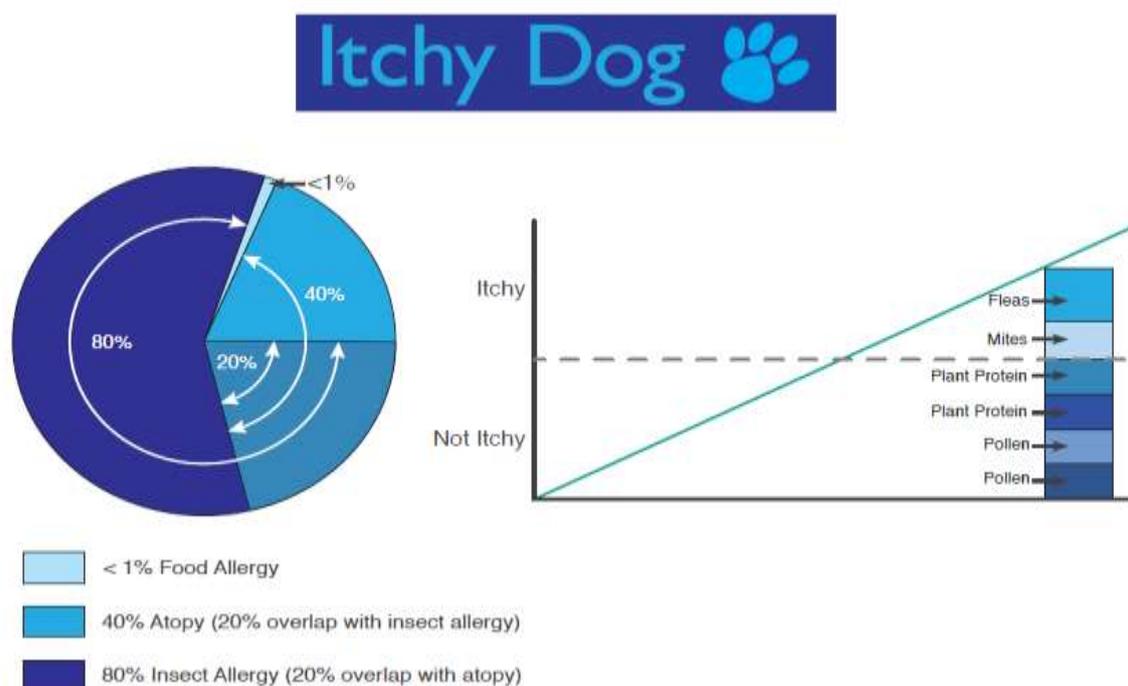


Hot Topic: Canine Skin Allergy

Dogs can show allergic reactions to a number of small molecules called allergens, that can be anything from plant pollens, grass proteins, dust mites (house dust) and insect bites.

While humans experience more respiratory symptoms with allergies (like hay fever and asthma), the main organ that is affected in dogs is often the skin. With chronic and often intense itching, they will scratch, lick or chew, until sometimes they lose hair or progress to skin infections. Because the ears are part of the skin, dogs with sensitive skin may often have ear infections as well.

The following diagram explains the breakdown of 'itchy skin' due to hypersensitivity reaction. There is a significant overlap between insect induced allergy and atopy, so for these dogs the treatment is rather complicated as simple insect control is not quite enough to resolve the itchy skin.



Fleas and other biting insects (80%): Flea-bite allergy is by far the most common allergy for most dogs and cats. Other insects or parasites including mosquitoes, sandflies, lice and mites may also cause allergic reactions in some animals.

Atopy (40%): This is an allergy to environmental factors such as plant pollens, grass proteins, moulds and dust mites. Animals with these allergies may show symptoms all year round or just seasonally. Reducing contact with these allergens may aid in the control of symptoms.

Treatment:

Tight insect control: Because insect bites and fleas represent the vast majority of causes for itchy dogs, it makes sense to eliminate the insect problems first. Using a good quality flea

preventative product will reduce the chance of exposure to fleas/insects. Controlling fleas on the animal and in the environment is essential.

Shampoos and conditioners: Medicated shampoos, made by veterinary dermatologists, can help to control the microbes (bacteria and yeasts) present on the skin and also wash off all the offending microscopic materials stuck on fur that can irritate the skin. Applying leave-on conditioners will help to create an extra barrier layer as well as soothing dry, flaky skin.

Omega 3: The benefits of Omega 3 are complex, but include helping with allergies and autoimmune conditions, osteoarthritis, skin and hair coats, eye and brain function.

Antihistamine: Antihistamines can help to alleviate the itch and control allergies. It is often incorporated as part of a treatment plan consisting of insect control, fatty acids and avoidance of the offending materials.

Treatment of concurrent skin infection: Chronically irritated skin often becomes infected by normal skin flora, such as Staphylococcus bacteria, and yeast. It is important to address this as well as treating the underlying allergy. We can perform a cytology test to confirm the presence of infection and assist in starting appropriate treatment.

Immunotherapy: If the response to any of the above is inadequate, referral to a skin specialist may be warranted. Specialists can perform intra-dermal skin tests to determine what the dog is actually allergic to, followed by tailor made desensitising injections.

In conclusion, there are a number of different possible causes for 'itchy skin' in dogs, and various ways to address these issues. The main take home message is the importance of strict insect control, but understanding that your dog may also have concurrent atopy. Secondary bacterial skin infection is also common, especially during the summer season, so if your dog has itchy skin, book in for a skin consultation with one of our friendly vets here at Warner Vet.