

# Preventing and Treating Hot Spots In dogs.

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**A** hot spot refers to a specific area of skin that becomes infected and inflamed. The cause of the infection is usually self-inflicted by the dog excessively scratching, chewing or licking in one area, it is similar to when a child has an itch, they scratch and they make the skin sore and they continue to scratch to try alleviating the discomfort, it is exactly the same for the dog. Often the dog will work relentlessly at the area, and the damage and infection will spread very rapidly.



Early stages of a hot spot are small abrasions on the skin, caused by the dog scratching the surface of the skin and breaking the damaging it.

A hot spot is sometimes known as moist dermatitis. You can try to alleviate the problem yourself to begin with, but if you fear your dog has a major problem, then seek veterinary advice.

Common areas where hot spots are seen are around the back area, top of tail, on the paws, neck, chin or behind the ears, although in theory a hot spot can appear anywhere on a dogs body.

## Signs and Symptoms that your dog might have a hot spot.

**Common signs of hot spots on dogs include:**

- Constant licking or chewing of an area
- Constant scratching to alleviate the itch
- Scabbing – Crusty scabs are often the first thing an owner will feel.
- Red skin
- A weeping wound if infected, the area can appear quite wet.
- Coat missing



It is not uncommon for some dogs to become quite snappy if you try to inspect the worrying area, this is due to the discomfort the dog is feeling and therefore prevention is better than cure, by checking your dog over, regularly, particularly if you see them scratching, check the area where they are scratching. Contrary to the name for this, hot spots don't just happen in hot weather; they can happen at any time of the year. The word spot is to do with an indicator of an area, not spot like.

## Causes of Hot Spots

Determining what is the underlying cause of the hot spot appearing, is essential to preventing them reoccurring, but it can be difficult to stop, if it has become a habit for the dog.

- **Residual Habit**

Something very simple and trivial may have led your dog to lick or scratch an area of skin, then this has turned into a habit or routine which sees your dog compulsively licking and chewing his paws, legs bottom or scratching his head and ears, until the habit itself becomes the real problem.

### Parasites - Check for parasites of any kind:

- mites
- fleas
- insect stings

- **Allergies**

Dogs can suffer allergic reactions from a variety of causes; one of the main contributors is diet. Make sure the diet you are feeding is right for your dog.

- **Injuries**

Often when a dog has had an injury, they lick at the area to alleviate the pain. Licking releases endorphins which cause pain blocking. This can create a problem of its own.

- **Boredom**

Some-dogs have been known to cause a hot spot because they are simply bored and lick or scratch at themselves to relieve the boredom.

- **Stress**

Some pets could be stressed and try to relieve that stress by licking at themselves. For example a dog suffering separation anxiety, noise phobias etc. could trigger licking with which may create a series of different problems.

# How to Treat a Hot Spot

When you notice any kind of dog skin irritation, you should always consult your veterinarian. Since there is a possibility of more serious skin infections, it is advisable that you seek some guidance from your vet as soon as possible.



Because hot spots can increase in size quite rapidly, you need to take action as soon as you become aware of the problem.

Here are some steps that you can follow to alleviate a hot spots problem at home, after you have consulted your vet:

Shaving coat from the area that has been affected by the hot spot is not necessarily the best option. However, it may allow you to examine the area more closely. Sometimes the shaving the coat can irritate the dog and actually encourage them to scratch more. Try treating the area without shaving first and see how the skin responds to treatment first.

- If you have already been to your vet, then shaving may already have been done for you.
- You will be able to see, how serious the problem is.
- Allowing the air to reach the area, will help a lot. If your dog is long coated consider tying some of the hair back away from the hotspot.
- Clean the infected area, with cool water and a gentle skin cleanser, for dogs, like well diluted hibiscrub or mild solution of salt water.
- You can apply a cool compress a number of times during the day when you are home.
- Tea bags make for great cool compress option and can also help to dry the area.

## Hot Spot Treatments

If the infection is very severe, your veterinarian will usually prescribe topical drying sprays, medicated shampoos and oral antibiotics that must be regularly administered to your dog.

Some products that dog owners have found success with include:



- Topical sprays such as **Vetericyn Canine Hot Spot Spray**
- Salves: **DERMagic Hot Spot Salve**
- Sprays: **Vet's Best Hot Spot Spray**



## Prevention

**If the underlying cause is tangled or matted hair or trapped dead hair-** put the dog on a regular grooming schedule either at home or at a grooming salon. Collies, Old English Sheepdogs, Shih-Tzu's, Tibetan Terriers and other breeds with long hair that tangles easily should be groomed at least twice a week so that snarls and mats do not form. Clip mats if you cannot easily comb them out, and make an appointment for professional grooming every four-to-six weeks if you cannot keep the dog mat-free on your own. In my opinion matting or a tight coat is the most common cause of a dog developing hot spots due to the dog scratching the coat to dislodge it.

**If the underlying cause is allergies** - begin an aggressive campaign to rid your home and yard of fleas and work with your veterinarian on a plan to reduce allergy triggers for your pet. Household dust, plant pollen, lawn chemicals, and diet can all cause allergies or can build to a crescendo of allergies if the dog's sensitivities cross a threshold. Leaving shampoo in your dogs coat after bathing, i.e. not rinsing properly, can also cause excessive scratching.

Frequent vacuuming, supplements to keep the skin and coat healthy, air purifiers, and baths in skin-soothing herbal or medicated shampoos with aloe, oatmeal, jojoba, or eucalyptus can help. Next step is over-the-counter antihistamines such as Benadryl or Atarax — with a veterinarian's approval. If these don't work, then steroids to reduce the inflammation and the immune system reaction to the allergen and perhaps antibiotics to cure the infected hot spot are the next course of treatment.

**If the underlying cause seems to be behavioural** - if your pet doesn't have allergies or fleas or a more serious skin condition, but is so bored, stressed, or lonely that he maims himself with constant licking or scratching, he may need more exercise, playtime, and attention. This can be the easiest or the hardest treatment to implement because there's no pill or ointment for long-term success; the requirements are time, consistency, and perhaps an investment in training books, an obedience school, a dog sitter, or an animal behaviourist.

You should keep in mind that hot spots are extremely painful and to be avoided at all cost. It is your job to keep up the maintenance and needs of your dog to avoid this nuisance for your dog from developing.

I hope you found this article helpful. Your feedback is always appreciated. Thank you.

Julie Hindle 2017

