Shedding Problems

Are you wearing your love for a pet on your sleeves?

by Annette Clark Hiott

One of the biggest challenges as a dog owner has to be shedding. In all breeds or mix of dogs, shedding is normal. Sometimes heavy shedding can be a sign of health problems. Skin allergies and skin parasites may trigger shedding. Other times poor nutrition or other health problems can be a cause of coat problems. Improper care of the skin and coat can also cause abnormal amounts of hair to be lost.

Types of Coats

Understanding the job of the dog’s skin and coat can help us better identify ways to prevent excessive shedding. Dogs can have three types of hair: First, soft undercoat that is seen in double coated breeds. These are more commonly the northern breeds, but exist in most breeds that developed in the colder climates. Secondly, the stiffer and usually longer guard hairs that form a protective layer to protect the undercoat and skin from harsh weather and cold water. Lastly, the whiskers that grow in clumps on the face are a form of “radar.”

These specialized hairs enable the dog to feel his way in the dark and also give him depth perception. The skin has several purposes, one being the protector of internal organs and muscle tissue. It also plays a vital part in the dog’s overall health and well being. When the normal balance of this protective layer is upset, it can cause many problems.

Keeping the skin healthy means not allowing infections, fungal or bacterial, to set in or allowing it to become too dry. You must also keep it free of parasites.

Is that Normal?

In normal shedding, dog hair grows and dies just as human hair does. It grows in cycles. When it reaches the length determined by the individual dog’s genetic makeup, it stops growing, and then dies.

Some dogs, such as Poodles & Bichons hang on to their dead hair, and require grooming to remove it.

Shedding seems to be connected to seasonal temperature, but it is actually governed by photoperiod or day length. Dogs that live outside usually shed heavily as days lengthen in spring, but those that live mostly indoors often seem to shed at least a bit all year, with a more noticeable amount in the spring. Dogs with an undercoat will blow their coat when shedding. This is a large amount of the undercoat that releases. Female dogs often drop their coats after a heat cycle or after whelping. Most dogs will also shed after undergoing anesthesia.

When that Scratch is more than an Itch!

Shedding or loss of coat can also be from unhealthy skin due to the above mentioned infections, dry skin or parasites. Fungal, bacterial and yeast infections can invade the skin due to many factors. One of these factors being moisture held on the skin by a dense coat. A dog that is matted or holding excessive undercoat that has not been brushed out, holds moisture due to a reduced airflow to the skin.

Dry skin can also cause excessive shedding. When the skin is not properly moisturized it cannot hold the hair follicle for the natural cycle. Dry skin also means itchy skin; thus causing the dog to continuously scratch and in turn lose more coat. Fleas and other parasites, such as scabies can cause dermatitis that results in hair loss.

It is important to understand the normal shedding process, as well as some of the main skin problems that cause excessive shedding. There are also helpful ways to prevent shedding.

They Are What they Eat

Proper nutrition plays a major role in the skin and coat. Choosing a dog food should be done by reading the ingredients as well as the protein analyses. If Corn or Corn meal is the first or second ingredient, you will be feeding more starch and less protein. If possible, finding a food that does not contain corn will ensure more protein and lessen the chance of many skin problems. Corn allergies are one of the biggest causes of skin issues that can include odor, shedding, and itching. Omega 3 & 6 supplements, available at most pet stores, promote healthy skin and coat. They can be added to your dog’s food daily.

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What You Can Do To Help with Shedding

Proper grooming and bathing help with the shedding process, as well as reduce the amount of excess shedding. The products used when bathing your dog play an important role in the balance of his skin.

#1 Use only detergent free products that are PH balanced for dogs. Using human shampoo can dry the skin as well as cause itching due to the fragrance and dye that is in it. It is also important to use a conditioner to moisturize.

#2 Bathing your dog regularly will help reduce the amount of hair that is being found all over your home. Warm water and the bathing process will help the dead hair release. It also will remove dead skin cells, thus keeping the skin healthy. If using a detergent free dog shampoo, preferable all natural, you will not dry out the skin and coat with regular bathing; nor will it affect your topical flea control.

#3 After your dog is dry, brush, slicker or comb the loose hair and undercoat out. If your dog has thick hair or undercoat, always use a comb to get the hair that is against the skin. Brushing only the top of the coat will cause matting of the hair near the skin, and continued shedding. Keeping the coat free of dead undercoat and mats will promote healthy skin by allowing the airflow to reach the skin. Brushing and combing also helps the skin release natural oils that keep the skin and coat healthy.

#4 Using flea prevention such as Frontline® or Advantage® which can be purchased at your local veterinarian is your best defense against fleas and ticks. It is much more cost effective than the many dips, powders, and collars. It is also the most efficient. Consulting with your veterinarian is always best before using any flea treatment.

Tips For Controlling Cat Hair Shedding

Start from the inside out
Your pet’s coat is a reflection of what she eats. You’d be surprised what a difference you’ll see if you insist on feeding your cat a premium or healthy brand food. High quality diets provide optimal nutrition rich in Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids that help soften skin and reduce excess shedding.

Give it the brush off
If you brush your cat regularly - and you should - you will notice that sometimes it produces very little hair, and other times it produces handfuls. You are simply witnessing changes in the rate of shedding. Using the right tools, daily or weekly brushing can detangle mats, remove dead undercoat, lift away excess dander, and add shine.

Keep it under wraps
Use attractive throws to protect your furniture. They are easy to put out during periods of peak shedding, easily removed when company visits, and can be tossed into the washer for cleaning.

Keep it in its place
There is an alternative to having cat hair all over your couch or favorite chair … and your clothes. Cat beds, trees, or play furniture afford your cat a comfortable place of her own to hang out.

Rinse, wipe, and spray it away
Bathing your cat regularly helps remove loose hair and excess oils, and reduce odor. If your cat is water-fussy, you may want to use disposable pads saturated with natural proteins and conditioners, or waterless cleaners which you spritz on, massage in, and towel off.

(source: www.drsfostersmith.com)