



# THE INTENSE ITCH OF MALASSEZIA

MALASSEZIA IS OFTEN MISDIAGNOSED, SO KNOWING HOW TO RECOGNIZE  
IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN TREATING YOUR DOG.





*Since beginning her holistically oriented veterinary practice over 30 years ago, Deva Khalsa VMD has been incorporating homeopathy, acupuncture, Chinese herbs, nutritional advice and allergy elimination techniques such as Allergy Elimination and JMT into her approach. Today her work is a blend of sophisticated holistic techniques and traditional veterinary medicine designed to best enhance the natural strengths and attributes of her patient. She is available for worldwide consults by contacting her online at [doctordeva.com](http://doctordeva.com)*

**W**e've all heard that skin is one of the first lines of defense against disease. In fact, the skin's first line of defense actually consists of a bunch of bugs, living in harmony. The collective group composed of all these bugs is called a microbiome.

These many different types of bacteria and yeast live on our pets' skin in balance, sort of respecting each other's boundaries. When a yeast called *Malassezia* steps over the line and overgrows its boundaries, the result is most often some pretty intense itching. This intense itching is oftentimes misdiagnosed as skin allergies.

Just like any other yeast, *Malassezia* likes to grow in moist, dark areas where the "sun don't shine." This yeast likes ears (where it is commonly mistaken for a dark sweet smelling ear-wax), underarms and groins, under the chin and around the anus and private parts.

*Malassezia* is lipophilic, which means having an affinity for fats or lipids, so dogs who tend to have a lot of oils on their skin will be more prone to the overgrowth of this yeast. Dogs who are particularly greasy, such as the Labrador Retriever, have more problems with *Malassezia*. Dogs who swim a lot, leaving damp areas where the yeast can thrive, can also have more problems. That said, almost any dog can have a problem with *Malassezia*.

Many people confuse *Malassezia* with candida and attempt to treat dogs with starch free diets, thinking this will handle the problem. In fact, the problem with *Malassezia* is the change in the microbiome of the skin, and not a candida of the gut.

## ALLERGIES AND MALASSEZIA GO HAND IN HAND

Allergies encourage *Malassezia* overgrowth by causing inflammation.

Skin inflammation from allergies, followed by scratching and biting, makes the skin irritated and moist, resulting in yeast overgrowth and giving the allergic dog a double whammy. It's a vicious cycle because the yeast is, in itself, extremely irritating and itchy. A dog with both allergies and *Malassezia*, **which is very common indeed**, has two very good reasons to itch. There's also a triple whammy as over 60 percent of dogs who have *Malassezia* overgrowth are actually allergic to the *Malassezia* and this allergy to the yeast intensifies the entire situation.

*Malassezia* is commonly found on the thickened, denuded areas of the skin of dogs with chronic allergies. A dog with *Malassezia* can have skin in the groin or underarm that looks like someone sprinkled pepper on it, or have little red bumps in areas, or grayish crusts that flake off the skin, or an orange-peel appearance to the skin, or hairless, elephant-like darkened skin. Dogs with *Malassezia* often smell, with an odor similar to old musty shoes.

## SUBTLER SIGNS

*Malassezia* isn't always this obvious. It can have a variety of sweet, yeasty smells and can appear as just a reddening between the toes or some brown crud on the top border of the toenail, or even as a dark grey-black patch on the skin. *Malassezia* can present itself as a reddened groin area or red inflamed areas under the folds of the front or rear legs. When it occurs in the ears, which is very common, you may find thickened ear flaps with an orange peel texture inside the flap, along with very itchy ears and brown ear secretions. If you put a cotton ball down your dog's ear canal and find dark brown stuff on it, then it's very likely your dog has *Malassezia* overgrowth in the ear. A dog's ear canal is much longer than ours and you're only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

Oftentimes, but not always, the budding yeast organisms can be found by placing tape on the skin and then staining it under the microscope, appearing as blue round or oval cells.

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## TREATING MALASSEZIA

While bacterial infections of the skin are typically recognized and treated, fungal and yeast infections can often go undetected, resulting in years of frustration because one of the real causes is unidentified.

It's important that you know if your dog has *Malassezia* in addition to allergies because *Malassezia* will cause the itching to persist even after the allergies begin to improve. That's why I recommend that you treat for the yeast infection concurrently if you believe it's present. In my consulting practice, I prescribe and prefer an energetic allergy elimination procedure because it's so

very effective. Yet, if I don't do my due diligence and check out if there is a Malassezia overgrowth, the allergies will totally clear up but the patient will still itch due to the Malassezia.

It can get very confusing if you don't get all the pieces of the puzzle lined up correctly when treating allergies in dogs.

## SAY NO TO IMMUNE SUPPRESSING DRUGS

I specialize in treating allergies and have treated many patients who've been given Apoquel (or other immune suppressing drugs) because they have been incorrectly diagnosed with allergies - when they actually have a simple overgrowth of yeast. As I said earlier, it's far more common to see a combination of allergies with concurrent Malassezia, playing off each other and creating a more intense itch. The bottom line is that skin problems in dogs are epidemic with younger and younger dogs succumbing to both allergies and yeast or yeast alone. I predict that the reckless use of these new allergy drugs will produce next generation dogs that have even more problems. Steroids like prednisone are meek and mild when compared to what Atopica and Apoquel do.

## SHAMPOOS CAN MAKE IT WORSE

I recently got a new English Labrador Retriever puppy from a very devoted breeder. She adamantly told me that Labradors should never be bathed, but simply hosed down with water. She said the only shampoo she used if she really had to, was an enzymatic shampoo. Her dogs all had beautiful coats and no smell. It makes sense, because by not using a detergent shampoos, we're keeping the microbiome intact and healthy. Once the imbalance sets in, the yeast has the opportunity to overgrow.

Washing your dog with a non-abrasive detergent shampoo, such as a Castile soap shampoo, will prevent the oil and microbiome from being stripped from his coat and skin.

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Conventional veterinarians will often prescribe medicated shampoos for skin conditions. But washing your dog repeatedly with detergent based, medicated shampoos is the last thing you want to do when he has a skin problem. Harmless-appearing shampoos with essential oils may actually be stripping your pet's microbiome, and many shampoos labeled "natural" are anything but,

often containing potentially toxic chemicals like sulfates, which they disguise by calling them "coconut-based."

For yeast, my preference is topical treatment with an enzymatic shampoo. There's a reason for this and you'll have to indulge me in a personal story. I got an area with Malassezia overgrowth, because I treat so many new patients who have Malassezia. So I treated myself with ketoconazole, which is a very good antifungal drug, for two weeks with no results. Then the dermatologist told me that I only needed to take one pill once only, then eat a little food and then go to the gym an hour later and work out till I was really sweating. I did it and it worked. Here's the rub, dogs sweat through their feet, but that's about it. They can get Malassezia all over their bodies. So that's another reason to avoid conventional drugs.

The yeast grows slowly, yet tenaciously. It can be difficult to get rid of because once it's established it's slow to recede. That's why you have to persist over time with the enzymatic treatment and be ready to jump in when the summertime comes along if your dog swims in lakes or swimming pools.

In my clinical experience, an unsettling number of dogs are prescribed an expensive and dangerous drug when they simply have a Malassezia yeast problem causing them to itch. The problem is that this drug eviscerates their immune system while we need to actually increase immune function to help handle the problem.

The moral of the story is that we should not lose sight of the forest for the trees. The bugs on our pets' skin make up their first line of defense. It seems, in treating Malassezia, many of the common treatments are backfiring and that's why so many dogs continue to have this problem. 🐾



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