

Cleaning a Dog's Beard Stains

Specialized products and pet wipes can help keep a white dog free of unsightly stains.

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Q. Can you suggest something that's safe that will whiten my Bichon Frise's beard? He doesn't have any tear stains, and I am careful to keep his beard area clean. I've tried filtered and distilled water, and his food doesn't have anything in it that would stain his fur. I've also tried some of the gels or liquids that say they help tear stains, but nothing seems to work.

A. Those nasty stains on his beard could be caused by the oxidation of his saliva, artificial coloration within his food and treats, or a yeast infection called *Ptyrosporin* or "red yeast," the very same culprit that causes unsightly tear stains in many breeds. Dog food that is heavy in grains and cereals also contributes to this problem, so feeding a diet with low or no grains or cereals may help, as will using stainless steel or crockery dog dishes instead of plastic and keeping them scrupulously clean.

That said, the best solution I have found for facial stains in dogs is a product called Angels' Eyes. I am not a chemist, but somehow it ties up the circulating compounds in the pet's system that react with light to produce those ugly stains. In other words, it changes his chemistry. A more technical explanation is available on their website.

Administered in powdered form, it is sprinkled on your dog's food with every meal, a teaspoon each time for a dog the size of your Bichon. If dogs balk at the taste, you may add it to their water instead. You will see a difference within a few weeks. As the stains diminish, you can cut back to using it about four times a week. In the meantime, have your groomer trim out the stained hair so the clean white hair can grow in. The company also makes a cleaning kit called Eye Envy that contains liquid, powder, and pads for follow-up care, but in my own dog's case, just the Angels' Eyes itself and a daily wash with witch hazel did the trick for his staining problem.

Some of my clients also swear by Pampers fragrance-free baby wipes to clean the under-eye and beard areas, and there are pet wipes on the market as well for such daily cleanups. I would also recommend using a whitening shampoo to wash his face – and his whole body while you're at it! Just be careful not to get the lather in his eyes or you might end up with another problem on your hands.

The show dog folks have all sorts of secret remedies to combat eye and beard stains on their bright white beauties, but many contain bleach or dyes so I would not advise using them on your little guy. Good luck getting him back to his snow-white splendor!