

Excessive Shedding in Your Dog

Many factors including environment, hormones, and diet can cause your dog to shed.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. What are the causes of excessive shedding?

A. Excessive shedding in any breed can be caused by both nutritional and environmental factors. Where I live, in cold old New England, we notice an increase in both shedding and dry flaky skin once people turn the heat on in the fall and winter months. Using a humidifier – or even placing pans of water on a heat vent or radiator to put some moisture into the air – will definitely help.

Shedding has another seasonal component. Dogs that spend a lot of time outdoors take their clues from the amount of sunlight they receive, shedding most in the spring as days grow longer. With less sunlight and cooler temperatures in the fall, dogs shed again as their thicker winter coat grows in. Dogs that live indoors under artificial light, like most of our pampered pets, do not rely on Mother Nature's clock but tend to shed year-round.

Hormones also play a part. After females have whelped or gone through a heat cycle, they often drop coat. Spaying and neutering also change a dog's coat, leading to more shedding and sometimes making them sprout fuzz. When a dog's coat is sparse or has bald patches, an underlying health issue may be causing the problem, so a trip to the vet is in order.

Regarding diet, make sure the food you choose has nutritious – and usable – ingredients. The best premium and holistic foods feature a combination of fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and protein sources to keep your pet healthy. But some brands on the market still have ingredients that dogs cannot easily process, such as corn, wheat, cellulose, and a host of questionable by-products like feathers, beaks and claws. If your brand does not contain essential fatty acids from fish – Omega 3 and Omega 6 – adding a daily supplement may help alleviate your dog's shedding problems.

Kathy Salzberg, NCMG, is a Certified Master Groomer and writer who has been grooming pets since 1976. With her daughter Missi, she owns The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass. She has also written extensively on pet care for several consumer magazines and authored three books on dogs and careers with pets. Kathy lives with her pets on Cape Cod.

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