

Over a period of time a "dog" person tends to pick up a lot of "information" on various subjects through reading materials, discussions, television and on-line email lists. One very popular subject among Westie people is "Itchy Skin". If you have a Westie, chances are good you have dealt with this topic at some time or other. Following is a collection of remedies.....some medical, some homeopathic, and some "old fashioned home" remedies. You may find some worth trying and others may seem silly to you. Maybe some of these will help you keep your dog off long-term steroids. We don't "recommend" anything but put out this list as a possible starting point for your research. These are not necessarily stand-alone options but the more you introduce at once, the harder it will be to tell what works and what doesn't.



We always recommend you consult with your veterinarian for any serious skin problems  
(Note: This document does not address flea problems)

### **MEDICAL**

#### Mange (Scabies)

Many dogs have Mange and test negative. So many vets will treat an itchy dog for mange "just in case". It is worth doing this, especially if you find yourself feeling itchy since the mite can infect a person temporarily. Revolution and Ivermectin are common drugs you would get through your vet for this condition.

#### Thyroid Testing

Many sources discuss itchy skin as a symptom of low thyroid. Your vet can take a blood test and send it to a lab. (The in-house testing is not sufficient.) A low or low normal test can result in thyroid medications that may resolve the problem.

#### Atopica (Cyclosporine)

Atopica has been on the market for quite a while now. More and more vets are finding it to be a useful tool in treating allergic skin issues. It is thought to be safer and have fewer side effects than steroids. It is rather expensive at first but Westies only use 50mg doses and the cost comes down as the dog is weaned from the drug. It can greatly reduce the allergies and, in some cases, get rid of them altogether. Nausea at the start is temporary and can be treated with an anti-nausea drug for the first ten days. The Westie Foundation ([www.westiefoundation.org](http://www.westiefoundation.org)) sponsored a study prior to the drug's release:

<http://www.westiefoundation.org/newsletter/04adseminar.htm>

#### Malassezia

See [www.westiemed.com/malassezia](http://www.westiemed.com/malassezia)

for information on a skin condition called Malassezia.

#### Allergy Tests/Shots

Your vet may take blood or send you to a doggie specialist. They may also do "scratch" tests. These tests are meant to determine what exactly your dog is allergic to so that you can avoid those items or injections can be made up containing those allergens that are meant to stimulate the dog's immune system. This is expensive and doesn't always work.

#### Genesis

From Virbac and available for use from your vet. This is a steroid spray applied topically on the specific areas of concern. We have found it to be very helpful and effective. In many cases more so than the steroid shots/pills. And it often can be used very sparingly. But must be used under a doctor's care.

## Antihistamines

Your vet will help you with the dosages for various antihistamines and will probably have some recommendations based on success with other dogs. Try at least three before giving up. Each one should be used for about one month before going on to the next. If you find one that is effective, start using it about 2 months before the allergy season so that it has time to become effective for your dog. There are both over-the-counter and prescription antihistamines that might be tried.

## Ear Treatments

When a dog is very itchy, the ears almost always get involved. This requires a trip to the vet and a prescription, often Ottomax or Genesis). Watch the ears carefully. If you can keep them clean, you may avoid other problems. Often a yeast infection will start here and spread when the dog starts scratching the ears. Cut the hair back around the spot; apply hydrogen peroxide to dry the area and Neopredel Powder that you should be able to get from your vet. You may need to reapply several times a day to keep the area dry. Put camphor spirits your vet. You may need to reapply several times a day to keep the area dry. Put camphor spirits around the area but not on the raw spot to discourage chewing.

## Hot Spots

Other products you might try are "Pink Stuff" (an ointment), Willard Water, Colostrum mixed with water and made into a paste.

## FOOD

### Note:

Many authors feel that dogs with seasonal allergies also have food allergies. If you could get control of the food allergy, the immune system could then concentrate on the seasonal allergies and do a better job of fighting them. (Other authors say that this combination is rare!!) Also please know that a dog can suddenly become allergic to a food which he has been eating for some time.

## B.A.R.F.

Bones and Raw Food is a feeding regimen that is becoming very popular. Many people using BARF maintain that it has cleared up their dog's skin problems. Before starting BARF, please do a lot of reading and research so you can be sure to do it correctly. There is a Westie Email list for this subject on Yahoo (ARF4Westies) (See food list at end for a couple of prepared BARF foods.)

## Home Cooking

Research will also reveal information on cooking for your dog. Like Raw Food, please research this carefully before beginning so that your dog will end up with a balanced diet.

A suggested source for information is [www.monica-segal.com](http://www.monica-segal.com) who wrote K-9 Kitchen and has a Yahoo email list

[K9kitchen@yahoogroups.com](mailto:K9kitchen@yahoogroups.com). Also MSU will review a diet for balance...see

<http://members.glis.net/bew1234/Education/Nutrition.htm> for more information on this.

## Specialty Foods

There are many, many people who will say that the change from one food to another made all the difference in their dog's skin. But there is no real agreement on just which food is the right one. That seems to depend on the individual dog. The only consistent thing I have noticed is that it is almost always a "specialty" kibble that is recommended; that is, one with human grade ingredients and usually no chemical preservatives. These are never found in grocery stores; sometimes found in pet or health food stores and almost always found over the Internet. The nice bonus about this is that the bags of food are delivered to your doorstep. See <http://home.hawaii.rr.com/wolfepack/foodcht3.html> for ingredient comparisons and many of the home pages.

## Elimination Diets

This can be done through your vet or you can try a "do it yourself" approach. Your vet has special foods available now that may make this even more efficient. Your vet can give you food where the proteins are broken down into tiny molecules that are easier to digest. If you do it yourself, find a food with very few ingredients. Feed this food for about 6 weeks and give your dog nothing else...no treats and no chews. Then after your dog's system is cleared of everything else, feed him a small amount of a different protein and see if there is a reaction. If there is, test it at least twice. This helps you identify what your dog might be reacting to. But don't introduce more than one item at a time and leave a week or two between items. (California Natural or Nutro Natural Choice are a couple of foods that might work.)

## MISC ITEMS

### Plastic and vinyl toys

Some dogs have a reaction to plastic and vinyl toys. If your dog has them and has problems in the mouth area, take them away for a while and see if it clears up.

### Plastic food bowls

Again, plastic can leach chemicals that will bother some dogs (and are often blamed for beard staining too). Make sure your dog is eating out of metal or ceramic (without lead) bowls.

### Physical Tools

To help you be aware of chewing and itching even when the dog is out of the room, put a bell on the dog's collar. When you leave the house, try an Elizabethan collar (from vet or pet store). Make sure it is big enough to make it impossible for the dog to chew or lick but no larger.

## GROOMING

### Shampoos/bathing

There is a school of thought that Westies should not be bathed very often. However, whenever a dog begins to have skin problems, one of the things your vet will usually recommend is frequent baths, usually in medicated shampoos. This will usually give the dog a lot of immediate relief from itching. The shampoos may be prescription such as Pyoban or over-the-counter such as Selsun Blue. Or you may use a doggie shampoo intended to reduce itching such as Eqyss Microtech. Whatever you use, be sure leave the shampoo on the length of time indicated (often 10-15 minutes) and then rinse thoroughly. When you are sure all of the soap is out, rinse yet again. The soap residue is often a contributor to the problem. While this will give immediate relief, it is not long lasting. You may need to bath the dog every day or two when the allergies are at their worst.

Rinses	My vet recommends Humalac as a skin conditioner. After all of the rinsing is done, give a final rinse with water mixed with Humalac (instructions on bottle). This gets through the hair and sits on the skin much as a body lotion will sit on your skin. It is not oily and does not affect the hair.
Stripping vs. Comb/Brush	Many people feel the best thing for a Westie's skin is to strip the hair. But most feel that a good daily combing/brushing to take out the undercoat does just as well. This must be done regularly to let the skin breathe.
Vinegar Soaks	Many people recommend soaks for the itchy dog. First fill your laundry tub or equivalent with lukewarm water (never hot). Then add 1-2 cups of Epsom salts. Let your dog soak in this for 10 minutes. Then empty and refill with lukewarm water. This time add 1-2 cups of apple cider vinegar (must be apple cider and not white; make sure it is real apple cider and not just "flavored"). Soak the dog in this for 10 minutes. Then, without rinsing, take the dog out and air dry. The smell will go away shortly.
Neem Tree Products	<a href="http://www.neemco.com/aboutneem.htm">http://www.neemco.com/aboutneem.htm</a> This product has been said to be very helpful with itchy skin and many other things. The web site covers the claimed benefits. They offer a shampoo and other versions of the Neem tree products.
Betadine	Some have found that putting Betadine on a sore spot or sore feet seems to help; Warnings: This is drying so be very careful; you may want to dilute; Also, this product DOES STAIN both the dog and the carpet, etc. You probably want to wrap after using it or let it set for a bit and then rinse off completely before letting the dog run.
Allercaine Spray	Spray on the itchy areas or even the whole body.....don't soak
Shirts/PJs	This is going to sound strange but I have found that it really helps to put a shirt on an itchy dog. It keeps their nails from damaging the skin when they scratch but it also seems to make them feel "less itchy" and they scratch less. I don't know why it works, but it often does. Also, I sometimes buy baby one piece outfits that have short sleeves and short legs. At bedtime or when they will be alone for a while, I put it on and snap the bottom snaps on each side of the tail. This protects more of their body. I'm sure not all will accept clothing but many will and it does seem to help.
<b>SUPPLEMENTS</b>	
Enzymes	More and more articles are being published on the need to add digestive enzymes to dog food. Kibble is cooked at high temperatures. Even if they add enzymes, the temperatures will kill the enzymes. Without these enzymes, many dogs are not getting the promised nutrition. Adding enzymes can make a difference in a lot of ways including improvement in skin conditions. There are a lot of brands available including Prozyme.
Missing Link	This is a supplement that includes enzymes but also includes many other natural ingredients that are meant to add back to food the many things that are lost in the cooking. Many people have seen an improvement in their dog's skin when they began to use this product. It has a website <a href="http://www.designinghealth.com">www.designinghealth.com</a> but can be found at lower prices (try <a href="http://www.revivalanimal.com">www.revivalanimal.com</a> )
Omega 3 & 6 Oils	Many brands can be found in capsules and squirt bottles. Often they are fish oils but can also be flaxseed oils.

Aloe in Water	Taking Aloe internally is used to stimulate the immune system and ease digestive troubles, as well as helping to expel internal parasites and give relief for symptoms of arthritis. As a maintenance it does not have to be given daily. Aloe juice can be given straight or added to water. One tablespoon per 20 pounds of body weight is recommended. Aloe, especially the outer leaf, or the outer leaf supplement, acts as a powerful laxative so it should be used very sparingly. Make sure the aloe juice you use is 100% pure and does not contain sodium benzoate. Two brands that are pure are George's and Lily of the Desert.
Colostrum	Bovine Colostrum is the available at health food stores. It is considered a nutraceutical. It is the first milk the mother produces for her babies. (Don't use if your dog is allergic to beef.) Do your research to learn about this and proper dosages and types. A site to start with is <a href="http://www.newlifefoods.com/">http://www.newlifefoods.com/</a>
Biotin or Vit. B Complex	Biotin is a product from Drs Foster and Smith which is intended to help with itchy skin issues and some have found it helpful.
Vit. E	Many feel that Vit. E is helpful with skin issues. For those with severe skin issues, they sometimes use 500 mgs a day and report that it has made a difference.
Probiotics	Do some research on Probiotics. There are products you can buy, usually at health food stores, which are considered probiotics. An example is "Acidophilus". Or you can buy low-fat yogurt with active cultures. These help the body fight off things such as yeast infections by helping to balance the "good bugs" and the "bad bugs" in the system.

## **CLEANING ITEMS**

Vinegar	Some dogs are allergic to various cleaning agents. Some people recommend throwing out all of your detergents, etc. and replacing them with plain apple cider vinegar. Use this for cleaning your carpets, your bedclothes, and other things the dog will come into contact with. If this is too extreme, consider doing an extra rinse after washing with detergents. For example, after the rug is cleaned, go over it once again with the vinegar and water in the detergent container. This will pull out detergent residue and replace with the vinegar and water mixture. Some suggest you pull up your carpets and go to wood or other "hard" floors.
Dust Mites	A dog may be allergic to dust mites. You can buy products to help with this. Some are added to the laundry. Some are bed clothes items meant to contain the dust mites. You can also use a steamer to kill dust mites in the mattress. (Might help you out too!!)
Furnace Filters/Air Cleaners	You can improve the filters you use on your furnace or add an air purification system to your furnace. (Remember for it to be effective the fan has to be running. That means if neither the air nor the furnace are on, you may have to run the fan independently) (You may have mold in air ducts or the air conditioner- have a professional clean them.) You can also buy portable air cleaners that will clean to different extents. Try <a href="http://www.aircleaners.com/">http://www.aircleaners.com/</a> and <a href="http://dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Shopping_and_Services/Environment/Air_Filters_and_Purifiers/">http://dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Shopping_and_Services/Environment/Air_Filters_and_Purifiers/</a>

## TOPICALS

### Tea Tree Oil

You can buy tea tree oil at health food stores (15% emulsion). Mix 1 ounce TTO (Tea tree oil) with 2 tablespoons rubbing alcohol (isopropyl alcohol) shake until blended. If TTO floats, add another tablespoon alcohol. Mix this suspension with six ounces of water and put into spray bottle. Mark bottle "Not for internal consumption" (you would not want to drink this mixture). Spray on feet or wherever the itching and licking is going on. Has healing properties and also taste and smells nasty. Some stores have this dilution already mixed but it costs as much as the 100% oil.

### Powders

Some different powders have been recommended to relieve the itching. One is Green Ban which can be found in health food stores; another is Gold Bond which can be found in the drugstore.

### Discouragement Products

Sometimes licking and chewing, especially on the paws, can be a bad habit. You can buy products to discourage this activity by tasting bad.

- Camphor Spirits (from drug store); Chew Guard or Butler Bitter Spray (from vet)  
Camphor spirits will not sting but the others may. Apply the camphor spirits with a cotton ball on the area. Apply the others around the area but not on open sores.
- Sulfodene – For raw areas, pat on the area and cover with something such as camphor spirits to discourage licking.

## HELPFUL LINKS

### Vet Information

<http://www.myvet.vetsuite.com/>

<http://vetmedicine.about.com/health/vetmedicine/library/diseases/bldog-allergy.htm>

[http://www.marvistavet.com/html/the\\_pet\\_web\\_library.html](http://www.marvistavet.com/html/the_pet_web_library.html)

### Food

(Listing of food ingredients) [www.doberdogs.com](http://www.doberdogs.com)

(Information on food ingredients) <http://www.msu.edu/~silver/health.htm>

### Some Specialty Foods

- Natures Recipe Lamb and Rice: <http://www.waggintails.com/programs/nrec.htm> 1-800-946-8245
- Beowolf Back To Basics: [www.backtobasicspetfood.com](http://www.backtobasicspetfood.com) (1-800-219-2558)
- Flint River Dog Food: <http://flintriver.virtualave.net/> (1-909-682-5048)
- Solid Gold Dog Food: [www.solidgoldhealth.com/](http://www.solidgoldhealth.com/) (1-800-364-4863)
- Innova; California Natural: [www.naturapet.com/](http://www.naturapet.com/) (1-800-532-7261)
- Nutro: [www.nutroproducts.com](http://www.nutroproducts.com) 1-800-833-5330 (Found in Pet Stores) (Natural Choice does not have corn but Max does)
- <http://www.auntjeni.com/homemade.htm> (Prepared BARF)
- <http://www.stevesrealfood.com/> (Prepared BARF)
- Wysong <http://www.wysong.net/>

### Other Products

[www.revivalanimal.com](http://www.revivalanimal.com) (on line catalog)

[www.eqyss.com](http://www.eqyss.com)

[www.designinghealth.com](http://www.designinghealth.com)

<http://www.neemco.com/aboutneem.htm>

<http://www.metafoods.com/> (Colostrum)

### Other Information

[www.westieclubamerica.com](http://www.westieclubamerica.com) Choose Health

[www.westielovers.com/westieworld/westiewisdom](http://www.westielovers.com/westieworld/westiewisdom)

<http://users.owt.com/jbaldwin/hints.htm>