

# pet problems — solved!

Holistic solutions to your furry family member's most common troubles *by Lisa Arcella*



**I**f you own a cat or dog, you've certainly been plagued by their stinky breath, itchy skin, upset stomach, or even fleas and other pests at some point. And although these issues appear to be only minor annoyances, left untreated, they can lead to serious health concerns for your pet. Check out these expert tips to keep your animal healthy.

## HALITOSIS

Everyone's encountered a dog whose bad breath is strong enough to knock you over, but just because it's a common occurrence doesn't mean it's normal, says Los Angeles-based veterinarian Karen Halligan, author of *Doc Halligan's What Every Pet Owner Should Know*. "Dogs and cats shouldn't have bad breath," she says. "They have teeth very similar to ours and if you don't brush them, food particles and bacteria along the gum line lead to plaque buildup, which, if left untreated, can cause gingivitis and periodontal disease."

Prevention is key: Keep an eye out for red or inflamed gums, as this could indicate infection, and clean your pup's teeth every other day with a toothpaste designed for pets (one to try: Ark Naturals' BREATH-LESS Brushless-Toothpaste, \$12 for 12 ounces, [kiwishoponline.com](http://kiwishoponline.com)). Hard chew toys are another way to keep teeth clean, and a high-quality, easy-to-digest diet may lessen the chances of decay. Check in with your vet if your pet has persistent bad breath—it could indicate more serious issues in the mouth, gastrointestinal tract, or respiratory system, says Halligan.

## SENSITIVE SKIN

Just like their human counterparts, pets can get flaky, itchy, irritated skin, too. And while it might sometimes be the result of environment, more often than not it's due to what

you're feeding him, says Jodi Ziskin, a holistic nutrition and wellness consultant for pets in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "If the stomach is being affected, the damage sometimes comes out through the skin," she says. The biggest allergens for dogs and cats are beef, chicken, dairy, corn, soy, and wheat, so Ziskin suggests working with your vet on an elimination diet—avoiding foods with allergy-inducing ingredients for at least two weeks to see if there's any improvement, then slowly reintroducing each item to see which might be the culprit.

Persistent scratching or hot spots—wet scabs that form on the skin from excessive scratching and licking—may also indicate that your dog or cat isn't getting enough omega-3s, which can help reduce inflammation in the skin and the lining of the stomach, says Ziskin. Adding an omega-3 supplement to your pet's food, like Nordic Naturals' Omega-3 Pet (\$15 to \$42, [nordicnaturals.com](http://nordicnaturals.com)), may help with some of these symptoms. You might also want to look at the shampoo you're using, says Halligan, which can further agitate sensitive skin. She recommends using an oatmeal-based shampoo, like Doc Ackerman's Colloidal Oatmeal Shampoo, to help soothe irritated skin (\$13 for 16 ounces, [docackermans.com](http://docackermans.com)).

## FLATULENCE

Sure, every 10-year-old (and plenty of adults) might think a gassy dog is funny, but frequent gas could mean more serious problems down the line, like inflammatory bowel disease or even cancer, says Halligan. Again, start by looking at your pet's food: Since cats and dogs have no biological need for grains (and dogs can only digest some), both animals use protein and fats as their main source of energy, says Ziskin, and can actually have trouble properly digesting grains. So if your pet

food lists corn or wheat as one of the first ingredients instead of specifically named meat, consider switching to something with fewer filler ingredients.

And if a change in diet doesn't seem to help, talk to your vet about putting your pet on a digestive enzyme or probiotic that's specially designed for sensitive stomachs. "Like people, some animals need more help digesting food than others," says Halligan.

### FLEAS, TICKS, AND OTHER PESTS

While it might be difficult to holistically battle bugs that typically cause problems for pets, it is possible, says Ziskin. She recommends products containing diatomaceous earth—a natural powder used as an eco-friendly pesticide. Look for a food grade quality, like Only Natural Pet All-In-One Flea Remedy (\$12 for 8 ounces, [onlynaturalpet.com](http://onlynaturalpet.com)) and simply apply it to your pet's fur, carpet, hardwood floors, and even bedding. "It essentially dehydrates the pests and kills them," Ziskin says. A set of tweezers is all you need for tick removal, but be sure to address this as soon as you spot them, since they can transmit disease within the first 24 to 72 hours. And if you've got a serious infestation, take your pet to the vet—it might require chemical treatment.

To keep irritating critters at bay, Ziskin recommends using a few drops of neem or geranium oil on your pet's collar every few days, but don't apply neem oil directly to your cat's skin, as it may irritate it. Try Ark Naturals' Flea Flicker! Tick Kicker! spray—it's easy to apply and safe for both cats and dogs (\$9 for 8 ounces, [kiwishoponline.com](http://kiwishoponline.com)). Ultimately, the key to flea and tick control is diligence, says Halligan. "You have to use pest control on pets all year around, every three to four weeks," she says. ●



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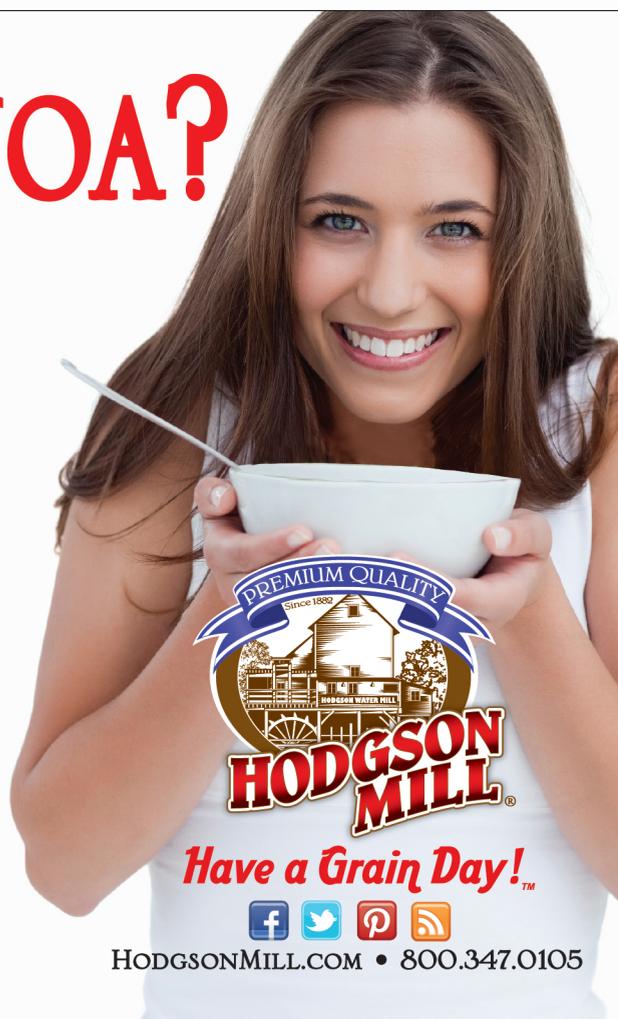
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