

# Understanding Bichon Frise Allergies

Owning a Bichon Frise means having a constant companion to bond and play with. Aside from the joy and laughter that a dog can bring to your relationship, he can also bring health problems that can bring discomfort to you or your dog. One of the most common health problem that Bichon Frises encounter is allergies.

## What are Dog Allergies?

Dog allergies are often caused by changes in the dog's food or environment. These allergies are distinguished by how the body reacts to unusual stimulus triggered by different factors. These are known as allergic reactions.

If your Bichon Frise shows signs of allergic reaction, you need to find out what is causing it. A veterinarian can help you verify the problem and then help you determine how to resolve it and strengthen his immunes system.

Dogs can react differently to allergies, even if it is caused by the same allergen. These allergens can at times be in the dog's body, causing it to react against itself, as in the case of auto-immune diseases.

Some dog breeds may seem less susceptible or even prone to allergies, but in actuality, no dog is immune to them, including the Bichon Frise of course.

## What Causes Dog Allergies?

There are many causes of dog allergies. For example, a dog might inhale grass or tree pollen. He could develop a reaction to dust granules. Maybe he's allergic to flea saliva.

Or, he could even be allergic to an ingredient found in his commercial dog food.

You will learn more about the different types of dog allergies later in this article.

## 6 Common Symptoms of Bichon Frise Allergies

Dogs exhibit different signs as a result of having allergies. Here are six of the most common symptoms to watch for:

### 1. Skin problems

The most obvious sign of skin problems is when your dog itches—more than normal—for an extended period of time. This excessive itching is dangerous because pustules can erupt and become infected. You may also notice redness and swelling of the problem area. If he has fleas, then the allergy situation can become more severe.

### 2. Hair loss

If your dog loses an excessive amount of hair, he could possibly have allergies.

### 3. Digestive problems

Excessive diarrhea and/or gas is a sign that your dog could have allergies.

### 4. Vomiting

If your dog vomits, it could be due to stomach and intestinal problems caused by allergies.

### 5. Foul odors

If you notice foul smelling odors, they are most likely due to infections in open sores on the skin.

### 6. Ear infections

Scratching or tilting of the head can be signs of an ear infection caused by allergies.

Pay close attention to your dog's behaviors—and the duration of the "episode." These could be important clues to determining your dog's health problems.

### What are the Types of Dog Allergies?

There are three basic types of dog allergies:

1. Flea Allergy
2. Inhalant Allergy
3. Food Allergy

### Inhalant Allergies

The environment contains allergens which can cause mast cells in the skin and basophils in the blood to release antibodies containing histamines, leukotrienes, and serotonin.

These are what cause the dog's allergy symptoms.

#### Causes

If your Bichon Frise inhales grass pollen or ragweed pollen, he could show signs of allergy. Your dog will show signs of dust and pollen allergies by scratching himself, biting himself, licking his paws, shaking his head and rub his face on the ground when pollen is in the air.

Some of these inhalant allergies are only seasonal. For example, some dogs may deal with grass pollen only in the spring and summer. Whereas, ragweed pollen could be a problem in late summer and early fall.

When pollen grains are in the air and the inhalant allergies occur, the dog will bite and scratch his body, shake his head, lick his paws, shake his head, and rub his face on the carpet or grass for relief.

Inhalant allergies can also be caused by household dust, mold spores, and other irritants. In these situations, the inhalant allergy is not seasonal, rather year-around.

### Prevention and Treatment

You can treat your Bichon Frise of inhalant allergies by giving him cool baths with shampoos or rinses with the ingredients aloe vera, eucalyptus, or oatmeal. These ingredients are soothing to the dog's skin. His skin will begin to heal as the allergen goes away.

You can also alter your dog's diet by including more Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids. Read the dog food's packaging labels to ensure these are included, or consider supplements after discussion with your vet.

Giving your dog a healthy diet containing vitamins and minerals will help improve his overall health, including his coat and skin.

In more extreme cases of inhalant allergies, there are antibiotic and drug therapy treatments that can be given. Talk to your vet about what options are best for your dog.

Also, be sure to keep your home—and especially the areas of the house where your dog spends most of his time—very clean. Vacuum the floors and furniture frequently and dust everything. Also make sure that you keep his bedding clean and fresh at all times.

Some dog owners treat their pet with antihistamines such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl), clemastine (Tavist), or chlorapheniramine (Chlortrimeton). However, it is very important not to give these to your dog unless you have spoken with your vet about the proper dosage.

If you go this route, it is important to point out that your dog's allergies may not fully disappear following these options. Therefore, you may have to experiment to find the solution that works for him.

In extreme cases, when nothing else seems to work, a vet may recommend prednisone (or other type of steroid). This will interfere with the immune system so the dog's body won't consider the allergens as invaders.

Steroids should only be used according to the vet's recommendations. Excessive use of steroids can cause liver problems for the dog. For older dogs, it can create a form of Cushing's disease.

Other side effects of steroids are that it can cause the dog to have an increase in appetite and thirst. This can lead to frequent urination, which can cause more aggression for some dogs.

## Flea Allergies

Constant scratching can be a clear sign that your Bichon Frise has a flea bite allergy. This irritability can be so intolerable for the dog that he may actually chew himself raw while trying to ease the pain.

### Causes

Flea allergies can occur when a dog is allergic to the flea saliva. If the dog is bit by a single flea, the dog could begin chewing frantically.

He will chew most around his tail, inside his hind legs, and on his stomach in an effort to relieve the pain.

### Prevention and Treatment

To help prevent your dog from flea allergy complications, provide him with regular grooming. Have him cut as close to the skin as possible. This way, you can easily detect fleas and their droppings.

Also be sure to regularly apply flea prevention treatment to your dog. Your veterinarian will have a good supply of high-quality flea products.

Flea prevention treatments range from once-a-month treatments, pills, sprays, and shampoos.

There are even premise foggers that contain growth regulators and pyrethrins. Talk with your vet about which prevention treatments are best for your dog within your environment.

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A word of caution: Don't let price be a factor in your flea prevention decision. The better flea preventative products are usually more expensive, but they are much more effective.

Many dog owners prefer to go the "natural" route in preventing fleas by using plant products such as garlic and brewer's yeast. However, there is no solid proof that these actually deter fleas.

Other dog owners surround the dog crate or doorways with herbs such as southernwood, pennyroyal, or wormwood. Others, swear by herbal flea collars.

Then there are dog owners who brush lavender or eucalyptus oil throughout the dog's coat—usually weekly. Others sprinkle rosemary, dried lavender leaves, or eucalyptus into the dog's bed.

While these are all safe and resourceful ideas, it is not known for certain if they can really prevent fleas.

If your dog shows signs of irritated skin, you can follow the tips for shampooing, diet changes, and cleaning as described above in the Inhalant Allergies section above.

## Food Allergies

If your Bichon Frise shows signs of allergies, but you are quite certain it is not from inhalants in the environment, fleas in his coat or other health problems, your dog could suffer from food allergies.

It is sometimes difficult to determine food allergies, especially when the dog faces other allergies. It can also be a timely process as you experiment with different foods, trying to isolate the food allergens.

### Causes

These food allergies can cause your dog discomfort with severe intestinal and stomach problems. The most obvious signs of food allergies are diarrhea and vomiting, but it can also lead to ear infections.

### Prevention and Treatment

If you suspect your Bichon Frise has food allergies, take him to the vet immediately. Your vet can prescribe a new diet that is high in protein, carbohydrates and other nutrients that your dog may not have been receiving from his previous diet.

Some vets recommend a home-cooked diet for dogs with food allergies. This could include protein combined with rice or potatoes, which is a healthy, hypoallergenic meal. To do this, boil all the ingredients and serve the same amount as your dog's normal diet. After the food has been cooked, you can package meals in individual portions, freeze them, then thaw as you need them. (Caution: This diet should only be fed for a short period of time—one or two months at the most because it is not a well-balanced diet. It is only a test diet.)

Once your Bichon Frise is on the new prescribed diet, don't feed him anything else. You are trying to isolate the food allergen. If you notice that the symptoms go away, you can gradually bring new food into his diet to try and identify which ingredient is the cause for the allergies.

If the symptoms do not go away within four weeks, you can try another hypoallergenic diet. If the symptoms still do not go away, your vet will need to run more tests.

### When You Are Allergic to Your Bichon Frise

Approximately 15 percent of dog owners suffer from some sort of pet-related allergies. These allergic reactions can be mild or quite severe. Allergies can be caused by dander, saliva, skin or hair proteins, or fur.

How do these allergies affect the body? People can develop an immune reaction to a particular protein that is found in the sebaceous glands of the dog's skin.

Dogs are continually shedding, so when he releases these tiny scales of dead skin—dander—allergens are also being released.

A dog can also have allergens in his saliva and even urine. These allergens get trapped into his fur and when he licks himself, he is spreading them.

Additionally, as the fur dries out, there are microscopic particles that flake off and get into the air. When this happens, you can breathe in the particles.

These allergens can stay airborne for hours at a time and can stay potent for weeks—making it very uncomfortable for you.

### Symptoms of Allergies

If you find yourself sneezing and wheezing, or you discover itchy rashes, chances are you have allergies. If this is the case, you will want to consult with an allergist. He or she will be able to determine if your allergy symptoms are pet-related.

If you find that you are allergic to your dog, the allergist can help alleviate the irritating symptoms by creating a treatment routine. This could include medication, allergy shots, and/or alternative therapy.

### 15 Helpful Tips for Controlling Allergies

Unfortunately, there is not a cure for allergies. However, there are several things you can do to make life with your dog more comfortable:

1. Wash your hands frequently.

Wash your hands with soap and hot water immediately after handling your dog. If you are unable to wash your hands right away, avoid touching your hands with your face—especially your eyes, nose, and mouth.

If you have severe allergies and are in close contact with your dog, you may need to take frequent showers and change your clothes throughout the day.

2. Feed your dog a well-balanced diet.

Your dog's diet should include some natural fat. This fat helps to make your dog's skin less dry, resulting in less shedding. Talk to your vet about his recommendations on how to safely add fat to his diet.



### 3. Don't allow your Bichon Frise in the bedroom.

This tip takes a lot of discipline, but it does make a big impact on your reaction to allergies. Keeping your bedroom door closed is ideal because it keeps airborne particles away.

Sleep on mattresses and pillows with hypoallergenic polyester fillings. Also, as an extra precaution, cover your pillows, mattresses, and box springs with plastic, zippered, allergy-proof covers.

### 4. Brush your dog often.

It is ideal to brush your dog daily. However, if you suffer from allergies, you'll need to give another family member the responsibility of brushing the dog. If possible, the dog should be brushed outdoors.

If you live alone with your dog, consider taking him to a professional groomer. You could wear a dust mask and gloves for brushing him in between grooming visits.

### 5. Bathe your dog often.

Check your dog's current shampoo. It should be a hypoallergenic or oatmeal-based shampoo. If it's not, try switching brands.

If your allergies can't handle the bathing, have another family member be responsible for giving baths. Or, have your dog visit a groomer.

### 6. Wash your dog's belongings.

Get into the habit of washing your dog's bed, blankets, and toys on a weekly basis—either by hand with a safe soap or in the washing machine.

### 7. Check your vacuum.

Make sure your vacuum cleaner has a HEPA (High Efficiency Particle Air) filtration system. This type of system will help pull up and trap more of your dog's dander from the floor.

Note: vacuuming is recommended over sweeping because sweeping can stir the dander into the air, rather than trapping and removing it.

8. Have carpets cleaned regularly.

Even though you use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filtration system, it is important to still have your carpets steam-cleaned throughout the year. Try to have this done at least quarterly.

9. Dust often.

Use a damp cloth to wipe down surfaces such as tables, shelves, window sills, wall hangings, lamps, and other furniture and accessories. If necessary, wear a dust mask as you clean.

10. Keep the air fresh.

Use an air purifier one that contains a HEPA. This type of system will help eliminate dander from the air.

11. Wash walls often.

Wipe down your walls, baseboards, and wall accessories. Do this according to how severe your allergies are.

12. Stay away from heavy upholstered furniture and curtains.

These heavy materials can attract tiny allergens and trap them. If you have these heavy fabrics, be sure to vacuum them often. For curtains and pillows, have them professionally dry cleaned.

13. Change filters often.

Replacing air filters for central heating and cooling systems, the furnace, and humidifiers can help control and remove allergies.

14. Circulate the air.

Use exhaust fans and open the windows and doors to keep the home well- ventilated.

15. Don't smoke.

If you smoke, you are not only lowering your tolerance to the allergens in your home, but you are also aggravating your lungs that are already sensitive.

## Recommended Breeds for Allergy Sufferers

If you suffer from allergies, there are some dog breeds that will be less problematic for you.

Keep in mind though, that all dogs produce dander. Depending on the breed, some dogs shed their skin as often as every few days, while others shed every few weeks.

The less a dog sheds the less dander it produces. The following breeds typically produce less dander:

- Airedale
- Basenji
- Bedlington terrier
- Bichon Frise
- Chinese crested
- Irish water spaniel
- Italian greyhound
- Kerry blue terrier
- Maltese
- Bichon Frise
- Portuguese water dog
- Schnauzers
- Shih tzu
- Soft-coated Wheaten terrier
- Tibetan terrier
- Wire-haired fox terrier
- Xoloitzcuintli (Mexican hairless)

## Conclusion

You want life to be as comfortable as possible for you, your family, and your Bichon Frise. By educating yourself on the common dog allergies, paying close attention to your Bichon Frise's behaviors, and keeping your home clean, you can minimize allergy problems before they get out of control.

I wish you all the best.

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