

Amy West's Care of White & Light Coated Dogs



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Common Problems of Dogs with White or Light-colored Coats

Dogs that have white or light-colored coats are often prone to problems that dogs with darker coats do not have.



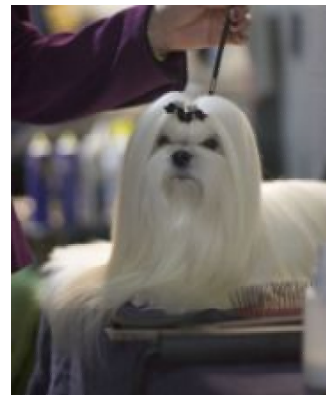
Even dogs that have only white on their faces or paws or necks or spots of white can have some problems due to the lighter skin tone and fur color.

Problems can range from sunburned skin to stained fur and from skin allergies to hot spots and infections. Many dogs with light colors around their eyes tend to have excessive tearing which stains the fur of their faces when it contacts the oxygen in the air.

If dogs lick light-colored legs or paws excessively, the licked areas will appear rusty.

There are several things in terms of good health practices that you can do to ensure that your dog's does not develop some of the common problems.

If your dog does develop one or more of the common problems, there are things you can do to lessen the effects on your dog's appearance, comfort, and health.



Good Health Practices

Regular Vet Checks

Take your dog to the veterinarian twice a year for a check-up.

Be sure to tell your vet about any changes in his behavior such as excessive licking or changes in his hygiene such as more tearing than normal.

Your vet can check for ear and eye infection, ear mites, gum disease, and clogged tear ducts.



Healthy Diet



Feed your dog a healthy diet. Many dogs have allergies to ingredients or additives in dog food. Cereals like corn and wheat are common allergens. Artificial food colorings (dyes) and various artificial additives and preservatives cause allergies.

Look at the list of ingredients on the dog food. Try to feed a food that has no additives, preservatives or dyes. Since corn and wheat are fillers in dog food, you may need to look for a food that uses vegetables and/or rice along with actual meat. There are many dog foods available today which are totally free of all the additives, preservatives, and dyes.

Foods that have a lot of cereal fillers have a higher (more basic) pH which is hard on the dog's digestive system. If the food has a basic pH or the water has a basic pH or the combination of the two is basic, the dog will have trouble with digestion and will develop allergies.

Signs of allergy may include excessive tearing or excessive pawing at the eyes, face rubbing, licking of front paws, head shaking, and eye or ear inflammation.

Clean Water

Another source of allergens is water which has had minerals added to it. If you suspect that this is causing a problem, change to filtered water.

You can use an inexpensive water filtering system such as Brita® or Pur®.



The pH of drinking water for dogs should be fairly acidic at about 2 or 3. Sometimes there is an interaction between water and food when the pH of both is fairly high (basic).

Stainless Steel and Ceramic Bowls

Always put your dog's water in a stainless steel bowl and put his food in either a glazed ceramic bowl or a stainless steel bowl. Plastic bowls harbor bacteria, which the dog then



eats or drinks or which can get into the dog's chin, nose, or other facial or chest parts. The ensuing infection can be quite serious and hard to eradicate.

Clean Eyes

Keep your pet's eyes clean. Start by washing your hands before touching your pet's face.

Purchase a pack of cheap, soft cotton washcloths (they usually come packaged 3-6 in a package) and designate these as your dog's washcloths. Each morning (and evening if necessary) use a damp washcloth to clean the hair around your dog's eyes. Do not use soap. If you need soap, use a drop or two of "tear-less" baby shampoo and then rinse the area well with clear water.



Use the damp washcloth or a tissue or square of soft toilet paper to remove matter from the inner corners of the dog's eyes.

If your dog's eyes are red or you have to remove matter from them more than once a day, talk to your vet about using sterile saline drops in the dog's eyes.

Normally one drop in each eye each day helps to thin and clear the matter as well as helping with the redness. If your dog's eyes continue to be red, ask your vet about giving your dog an antihistamine such as Benadryl. He can advise you on dosage.



To remove discoloration from under the eyes or around the eyes or ears, use a cotton ball or pad soaked in boric acid powder dissolved in warm water or saline solution. Never use hydrogen peroxide on or near the face as it can get into the eyes and damage them.

You or a groomer should clip the hair around the eyes using thinning shears every two to four weeks. This keeps the hair from touching the eye or scratching the cornea.

If matter tends to build up in the hair under your dog's eyes, sprinkle baby powder (corn-starch based, preferably) into the hair under the eyes. Be very careful not to get it into the eyes. Use a baby toothbrush or a flea comb to spread it through the hair.

Clean Ears

Dirt and wax in your dog's ears needs to be removed regularly. Using a cotton ball or cotton pad, dust your dog's ear with boric acid powder or medicated ear powder.



Cotton swabs dipped in ear wash can help your remove dirt and wax. Large amounts of reddish-brown wax or wax that smells bad may indicate a case of ear mites or an infection. Check with your vet for the proper treatment.

Ear hair should be trimmed with small, blunt-tipped scissors or plucked one or two hairs at a time with forceps or tweezers.



Using a cotton ball or cotton pad, dust your dog's ear with boric acid powder or medicated ear powder. If done prior to hair removal, the powder will aid in grasping the hair.

If done after cleaning the ear, it will keep the ear and ear canal drier, so it is not so easily prone to waxy build-up or infection.

Dogs such as Retrievers that are prone to heavy build-ups of earwax may need special ear wash available from your vet.

Groomed Paws

Some dogs are easily irritated by long toenails or fur on their paws. They will lick and suck their feet, trying to get them clean. You may need to keep your dog's toenails cut every couple of weeks.

You may also need to use curved shears to trim the fur on the bottoms and sides of his feet. A professional groomer can help you learn how to do this.



Avoidance of Allergens

It is important to be aware of allergens in your dog's environment. Do not walk on grass that has been treated with chemicals or on surfaces that have been treated with ice melter.

These chemicals can cause allergies, and if the dog ingests the chemicals, they can cause illness or death. If your dog walks on such surfaces, wash his feet thoroughly by dipping them in warm water and then drying them with a soft, absorbent cotton towel.



Be sure to treat your dog monthly with flea preventive as many dogs have severe allergies to flea bites.

Seasonal allergies to pollens of trees, grasses, weeds, molds, mildew, and dust mites are very common among dogs. Often these cause the dog's eyes to be red and/or runny. They may also cause itching (either localized or all over), sneezing, or trouble breathing.

Avoiding all of these allergens is probably not possible, nor is it feasible to test the dog to see exactly what he is allergic to. Therefore, it is up to the dog owner to watch and see when his dog's symptoms get worse or better and to treat the symptoms as needed.

How to Deal with Specific Problems

Tear Stains on the Dog's Face

What causes the facial fur to tear stain? What can be done?

Body secretions such as tears and saliva contain Porphyrins, which are compounds which react with light to produce a reddish brown stain. Another cause of the stains is a yeast infection called Ptyrosporin (Red Yeast). Some bacterial infections also cause excessive tearing and staining.

There are many topical products available to bleach the stains. There are other products available as eye drops, which help in some cases to lessen the tearing and staining.

One of the most effective products is added to the dog's food. The main ingredient in it is tylosin, which ties up the porphyrins and keeps them from causing the secretions to stain the fur. The tylosin is in a base of 100% pure beef liver, which dogs normally love.

One brand is called Angel's Eyes and is available from groomers or online. Add the appropriate amount for your dog's weight to his food daily for up to three months. Then add it only two to four times a week. As the stained fur grows out, clip it off.



Matted Fur under the Dog's Eyes or around his Ears

If matter tends to build up in the hair under your dog's eyes, sprinkle baby powder (corn-starch based baby powder will help keep the area dry naturally) into the hair under the eyes. Be very careful not to get it into the eyes. Use a baby toothbrush or a flea comb to spread it through the hair. Use thinning shears to keep hair trimmed away from the eyes.

Rusty Fur – stained fur around the Mouth, on the Paws, on other parts of the Light-colored Coat

Body secretions such as tears and saliva contain Porphyrins which are compounds which react with light to produce a reddish brown stain. Another cause of the stains is a yeast infection called Ptyrosporin (Red Yeast).

There are many topical products available to bleach the stains. Groomers often use hydrogen peroxide; however, do not use this without plenty of rinsing as dogs can get sick if they ingest the hydrogen peroxide when licking the spot.

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Sunburn on the Nose or Back

Sunburn is common in pale and short-haired dogs, usually on the bridge of the nose, the abdomen, groin, and insides of the legs.

The belly is prone to sunburn because of sunlight that reflects up from the sidewalk. Similarly, dogs that spend a lot of time at beaches can get sunburn from sun reflecting up from the hot sand.



Sunburn and repeated, excessive exposure to UV radiation can lead to skin cancer, particularly squamous cell carcinoma, in dogs just as it does in humans. Sunburn can also cause skin ulceration, leaving the skin susceptible to opportunistic bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections.

Sun exposure may also exacerbate autoimmune skin diseases. As the sun damages the skin, skin cells die and can release proteins that inappropriately trigger the immune system.

To protect pets from sunburn and its consequences apply sunblock on the small susceptible areas of skin, such as the bridge of the nose and the ear tips. You can also apply a line of sunblock along any part in the fur along the head or back.

Sunblock may not be effective on the abdomen of dogs since it can rub off in tall grass, wash off at the beach, or be easily licked off by the dog or its playmates.

There are spandex-type bodysuits on the market designed to block UV radiation. Although the idea of bringing a bodysuit-clad dog to the park or beach may sound ridiculous or embarrassing, it may be the most effective and important sun protection you can provide for your pet.

If the skin is sunburned, apply pure aloe vera to the area to promote healing and try to keep your dog from licking the area.

Licking Obsession



When dogs lick their paw(s) obsessively, they may have an allergy to something in their food or to something like carpet cleaners or grass. Some dogs lick their paws out of boredom. And other dogs lick their paws because their toenails or the hair on their paws gets too long.

The easiest thing to change is the length of toenails and the fur on their feet. Start clipping the dog's toenails every two to three weeks instead of monthly. At the same time, use curved blade scissors to trim the fur on the sides and bottom of each foot. Wash and dry the dog's feet whenever he has been outdoors.

If the obsessive licking continues, look at the ingredients of his food. Dogs often develop allergies to corn or wheat, so change to a food that does not have those or meat by-products.

If the pads of the paw are red, the dog may have a fungus or infection from the paw being damp all the time. A possible "cure" is to soak the affected paw in Epsom salts dissolved in warm water for five minutes three times a day for about 5-6 days.



Always try to distract your dog from licking when you catch him doing it. Give him a filled Kong®, a Nylabone®, a rope toy, a bone, a pig's ear, or a hoof to lick or chew instead.

Scratching or Licking to the point of creating a Hot Spot

Fleas, lice, and various skin mites cause dogs to be itchy. Remember that you have to eliminate the parasite from the dog by the treatment recommended by vet and you have to eliminate the parasite from the dog's environment.

That means that if the dog has fleas, you have to treat the dog for the fleas and you have to have an exterminator treat your yard for fleas. You will also have to treat your home for fleas and wash your dog's bedding and your rugs and carpets to rid them of flea eggs.

Bacterial skin disease which can be primary or secondary may be the cause of the itching. Or the dog may have a yeast infection. Only your vet can diagnose and treat these.

Other causes of scratching and licking are various types of allergies. If it happens at a certain time of year each year, it is most likely an allergy to something in the air or to grass (or whatever the dog lies in or on while outdoors).

Fatty acid supplements will help with itching and shedding. These can be purchased from a pet supply or from your vet, but your vet should recommend the exact dosage and monitor the response of your dog to the fatty acids.



Your vet may also recommend an antihistamine like Benadryl (25 mg twice a day) to reduce itching.

An oatmeal shampoo with cool water helps to ease the itching. Leave the shampoo on for about 10 minutes, then rinse well. You may have to do this twice a week. Once the itching seems calmer, you can do it once a week. Then do it as needed.

Hot spots can be treated topically with a product called Sulfodene® (2-Mercaptobenzothiazole) applied with a cotton ball. It comes in a liquid or an ointment. It will discourage licking, relieve the pain and itching, and promote healing when used twice a day for 7-10 days.



An Elizabethan collar may be put on the dog to keep him from scratching or licking while the hot spots heal.

A White Dog's fur has a brown, grey, or beige cast to it

The white or light-colored fur on many dogs does not always look sparkling white after a bath. The easiest remedy for this is to use a dog shampoo that is specifically formulated for white fur. Usually these shampoos contain bluing which helps to whiten and brighten the coat. These are readily available on the internet or in pet stores.

