



My Westie is Itchy...what should I do... and not do!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

You are probably reading this because you are at your wits end with your itchy Westie. You have been to a number of Vets with little if any improvements and it has been expensive and frustrating...watching your darling Westie suffer is a terrible thing.

We have been asked by many folks to make a step by step document of Westies in Need itchy skin protocol-so here goes...it is LONG and there is lots of info...but please read it carefully and let us know if you have any questions...Westies in Need has had some incredible improvements...we know Westie skin!

I think we should start by saying that your Vet will most probably NOT agree with some of our suggestions...many Vets are wonderful and very open to new ideas...some are not! However, you have been to a number of Vet appointments and spent hundreds (if not thousands) of dollars and yet here you are still searching for a solution to your itchy Westie, so...you have to begin to ask yourself (and your Vet!!!!) “How has that been working for you?????”

I guess that we should also begin by making our lawyer happy and say “While every endeavor is made to provide reliable, useful advice not every dog is the same and neither food nor medical treatments can be said to apply in every case. You should use this information as a RESOURCE to guide your own research and to help you in discussions with your Vet.”

OK...now that is out of the way...let's start...first...

Blood Work: you will need to make sure your Vet has done full blood chemistry on your Westie-we will need to have a starting benchmark to begin with. Some Vets call this a “Wellness Panel”, other Vets have other names...but you need to find out organ function, electrolytes, hematology, proteins etc. **It is VERY important to make sure that you include a thyroid test as well** (more thyroid info will follow) but you need to have that included.

You MUST insist that you see and have a copy of all tests done on your Westie...a Vet saying “I did the blood work and it is all normal” is not good enough. You have now made the decision to be an ACTIVE participant in your Westies health and that begins with the results. Blood work can be expensive but very worth it.

Thyroid: The thyroid gland uses the measured release of thyroid hormone to regulate the speed of many bodily processes. Thyroid problems occur when the rate of this release is disturbed. The most common thyroid issue in dogs is a decrease in the production and release of thyroid hormone known as hypothyroidism.

Many, many itchy Westies have hypothyroidism. When you see the results that your Vet will show and give you for your dogs' thyroid function from the above blood test, you will probably see (if they use IDEXX labs) a “normal” range of about 15-51. So if your Westie's thyroid function is 15.1 your Vet may say that the thyroid is normal. IT IS NOT...for our breed and for a dog with skin issues, we want to see the thyroid level in the 40%-50% range...so if your Westie is not showing a thyroid function of about 30, they MUST go on a medication called

Thyroxin. You will never completely get your Westie's skin well if the thyroid is not functioning well.

Yeast: Far too often when Westies are diagnosed with allergies, they are in fact really suffering from a systemic yeast infection, be it on the surface of the skin or the whole system. If this is the case, antibiotics and steroids will not clear up the source of the problem. They only address secondary bacterial infections and provide temporary relief from itching.

Yeast problems can be caused by different yeast organisms. One is *Malassezia pachydermatitis*, which is a common yeast organism found on normal and abnormal canine skin and ears. Other yeast problems involve *Candida Albicans*, which can be systemic and the root cause of the problem. Yeast found in the body changes to its fungal form and starts to overgrow in the gut, causing toxins to leak into the body and causing a breakdown in the body's defenses (immune system). The result is that we start to see a reaction (such as a skin, coat, ears) and the reaction is in the whole body's system (systemic). If you understand that the skin is the biggest filter organ in the body, you can understand that this is where the junk and toxins in the body end up, causing the issues you see in your Westie.

Our yeasty Westies (they smell like popcorn or a corn chip kinda smell) all go on a 30 day course of Ketoconazole. Ketoconazole belongs to a general class of drugs known as antifungal drugs and inhibits the growth of fungal organisms by interfering with the formation of the fungal cell wall.

Please take a VERY careful look at what you are feeding your Westie---a low glysemic diet is best....don't feed the yeast!!! Yeast needs sugars to grow...so please try to eliminate or greatly reduce in both foods and treats:

- potatoes
- sweet potatoes
- carrots
- tapioca
- black strap molasses

Bacteria: All of our itchy Westies have some level of Pyoderma. Pyoderma refers to a bacterial infection of the skin. From our experience, the "tried and true" antibiotics that vets use (Cyclosporine, Cephalexin, etc) are good, but we have had better results using an injectable Convenia. It is a long-acting antibiotic that exerts its antibacterial effects for approximately 1-2 weeks but stays in the body for over 2 months. This is in contrast to non-repositol antibiotics which are rapidly cleared from the body and need to be administered 1 - 2 times per day. We give our itchy Westies an injection of Convenia on day 1 and again on day 14 of their treatment.

Mange: There are 2 types of mange...one is Demodectic and one is Sarcoptic. Most dogs are immune to mange; however dogs with compromised immune systems and the elderly are at a higher risk. Your Vet can do a simple skin scraping to make sure your Westie does not have mange---again without that info you can pump all kinds of medications and drugs into them and they will not improve, so you need to rule out mange.

Vaccinations: There is a lot of controversy right now over vaccinations (in both people and pets) and the fallout of over vaccinating your Westie can be devastating. In our opinion (and we have to stress here that this is our opinion and you must do your own due diligence with your

research!!!) we would suggest that you consider NOT vaccinating your Westie until their skin has been 100% perfect for **over a year**. We mean no rabies, no DHPP and no heartworm.

Afterwards, if you choose to vaccinate your Westie (and yes it is a choice!!!) the most important thing we suggest is to NEVER vaccinate your Westie for anything in the spring, summer or fall months. Their immune systems are at their most vulnerable at those times and skin problems are much more likely to occur. Only vaccinate your dog if there is snow on the ground!!!

Also, never vaccinate for rabies and DHPP at the same time-it is very hard on Westies and again not good for their immune system. It is very important to wait at least 2 weeks between rabies and DHPP-they should NEVER be given at the same appointment.

Titer-Testing-an alternative to vaccinations: A number of our Westie folks have opted for a titers test each year and not deferring to the automatic vaccination protocol. A titer test (pronounced TIGHT-er) is a laboratory test measuring the existence and level of antibodies to disease in blood. Most experts believe that strong titers are a more reliable indication of immunity than vaccinations: tests show the **actual** immune response... not just the attempt to cause an immune response by vaccination.

Allergy Testing: In a nut shell, they are not accurate on dogs. We never recommend standard allergy testing and suggest that you spend your money on other treatments.

Atopica: (generic name is Cyclosporin) is the medication that many Vets prescribe to Westies with Atopic dermatitis (environmental allergies) Atopica often makes dogs vomit however it may not be the medication itself but the pill casing that does not sit well with them (it is made from castor bean oil that dogs don't process well) Put the Atopica capsule in the freezer and the vomiting will be lessened. If your Westie is still vomiting from the Atopica, consider using the Cyclosporin in a liquid instead!

Immune System: When you have a Westie that is itchy, has open sores, is biting at his feet or has chronic ear infections, you have a dog with an immune problem. Even if you cure or control the current problem, you will never completely fix the issue if you do not improve the immune system. Good quality foods, no stress, limit or eliminate all vaccinations will all help to improve immune function.

Steroid Use: Hydrocortisone, Vanectyl P (combining trimeprazine and prednisolone) and Prednisone are common drugs that Vets will use to stop a dog from scratching. These steroids should be only used in **extreme cases** and only for very short periods of time. They are meant to "put the fire out" to give the Westie some immediate relief but should never be used long term as they can do serious and irreparable damage to organs.

Food Allergies: Some Westies may be allergic to foods, but simply being fed these may not be enough in itself to get their immune systems hopped up to the point where itching occurs. However, when the pollens and molds of spring, summer and fall are added, the total number of allergens present will have reached high enough concentrations, thus exceeding the threshold, to cause allergic symptoms such as chronic itching. Food can certainly exacerbate a Westie's itchy condition and that is why it is so important not to feed foods that are known to be likely contributors...so everyone repeat after me...when choosing food and treats..."**no wheat, no corn, no soy, no beef, no lamb, no dairy**"...repeat please so we know you have it..."**no wheat, no corn, no soy, no beef, no lamb, no dairy**"

So what do you feed your Westie...well we can certainly tell you foods that we would NOT recommend... (OK...remember how we had said at the beginning that some Vets will not agree with our program...well, this is one of those parts!!!!)

NEVER FEED: Vet recommended foods such as Science Diet, Hills, Medical, Royal Canin...these are poor, poor, poor quality foods that have caused so many problems for our itchy Westies. If you don't believe us, please check out [The Dog Food Advisor](#)-or [Dog Food Analysis...](#)you will be shocked at the ratings of these foods!

We have found that most of our Westies do best on a fish based diet. What you are looking for is a **grain free low glyceemic diet**...low glyseemic because of the info we just told you in the section above about yeast...sugars feed yeast...please try to avoid (in the first 5-7 lines of the ingredients) any dog food and treats with

1. potatoes
2. sweet potato
3. carrots
4. tapioca
5. black strap molasses

Some foods that we use in our rescue and have had lots of success with are:

- [Horizon Pulzar](#)
- [Legacy Salmon](#)
- [Darford Zero G- Fish](#)
- [NRG Vitality Dehydrated](#)
- [NRG Maxim Dehydrated](#)
- [RAW---Pets 4 Life](#)

Be very strict with any treats you give him. The smallest piece of the wrong thing can make him itchy for at least 3 weeks.

Some good treats are

- [NRG Jerky Strips](#) are made of 100% edible table quality chicken and salmon meat. No potato, no filler, no cost cutting ingredients!
- [Honest Kitchen Wishes](#)... made with 100% wild caught Haddock

NO TREATS FROM CHINA, such as dehydrated Chicken, Duck and Sweet Potato- we have already lost one lovely Westie boy because his family unknowingly was feeding him tainted treats.

Use a Calendar: We strongly suggested that we keep a calendar handy that just has your Westies health info on it. When you record daily changes, changes to foods, snacks or treats,

changes with tummy upsets, scale of itchiness, etc... very often you will begin to see patterns that will help you when treating your dog.

Shampoo: It is VERY important to bath your itchy Westie...you must get the bacteria and yeast spores off the skin. We would suggest a bath every other day until the yeasty smell starts to dissipate and then every 3rd or 4th day till you see that the skin is looking less "angry". If the problem is over most of the body you may want to shave them down, you'll waste less shampoo and they will dry faster. Use cool water and towel dry only, do not use a hair dryer. **NO oatmeal shampoo...EVER**

The shampoos that we use and like are:

- Chlorhexadine (you get this at the Vet)
- Nizoral (you get that at a drug store)
- Dermacton (you will have to order this from the US-info is below)

Bath Time: wet your Westie and then lather them up-leave the shampoo on your Westie for at least 10-15 minutes. Keep them in the tub or wrap them in a towel and hold them (please don't put them cold and wet in a crate to lick the shampoo off!!!!!!)

After the 10-15 minutes, rinse off all the shampoo and make sure there is no shampoo residue. While still in the tub, finish off with an Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV) solution on them. Please Note: **YOU DO NOT RINSE THIS OFF!!!** (Instructions are below)

Natural organic apple cider vinegar has a brownish tinge to it and floating stuff inside. The floating matter is called "mother" and is formed from the pectin and apple residue. You can purchase it at most health food store. Put about ¼ of a cup of ACV in a plastic measuring cup and fill the cup with warm water. After the bath, pour the rinse (from the neck on down-do NOT get this in your Westie's eyes) and then towel dry---don't rinse it off. It is a great and natural way to improve the PH balance on their skin.

Foot Soaks- does your Westie lick it's paws??????????? We can not stress the importance of removing pesticides, herbicides, ragweed, grasses, pollens, molds, dust mites and other pollutants from your dog's feet on a regular basis.

Your dog's feet can gather a pretty heavy toxin load in addition to allergens, and this can become extremely irritating to his paws. 50 % of all foot licking and chewing can be immediately alleviated by removing allergens and other irritants collected on a dog's paws. It is important is to soak the paws at the end of any day when your pet has been in contact with allergens, lawn chemicals, or anything in the environment with the potential to irritate her feet.

You will need:

- a small tub or Tupperware container
- Povidone iodine (Povidone iodine is an organic iodine.. safe, non-toxic, antifungal, antibacterial, and anti-yeast)
- water

You want to dilute the povidone iodine with water to the color of iced tea, using just your eyes – no scientific formula is involved! If it comes up too light, just add a bit more of the iodine. If it's

a bit dark, add more water. We recommend you let your Westie stand in the solution for from two to five minutes. You don't have to do anything to the feet or toes -- the solution will do the work for you. You can just stand and sing to your Westie while he soaks, or talk to him and tell him how handsome he is.

Remember, the key is to get the feet submerged in the solution, which will wash away any type of yeast that might be growing, as well as mild bacterial infections, allergens, and other contaminants. Dry them off and you are good!

Lotions and Potions: We have found a product that we have used on our itchy Westies that has been great for us. It is in a shampoo, cream and spray form and it has worked wonderfully well to give our dogs relief. It is called [Dermacton](#) and can only be purchased on-line from the US.

We have used and liked the product so much we have even given them a few testimonials. Shelby (June 30, 2012) and Edward (October 3, 2011):
<http://www.equinat-usa.com/pages/testimonials.htm>

Supplements: The “go to” info and products that we refer to very often are products by Mercola and info from Dr. Karen Becker. Dr Becker is a Vet that has produced some great videos and we use their products as well.

[Mercola produces](#) some wonderful products that we have used:

- Digestive Enzyme
- Complete probiotics-this is especially important if your Westie is ever given anti-biotics. It is very important to make sure you add a probiotic while they are on the any antibiotic and for 2 weeks afterwards.
- Krill Oil
- Spirugreen

A store in Ontario has brought in the Mercola products (so glad we do not have to order from the US any longer) and has put together for us a **Westie Skin Repair Kit**. It is a wonderful kit and we can not thank them enough for doing this and also for offering any of our Westies in Need folks a discount when ordering. We use all these products on our itchy Westies!!!!!!

The Kit includes:

- Mercola SpiruGreen (anti-oxidant) –Immune Support
- Mercola Digestive Enzymes – Improved Digestion
- Mercola Complete Probiotics – Healthy Bacterial Flora
- Mercola Krill Oil (omega 3) - Essential for healthy skin
- Colloidal Silver – effective against yeast and bacteria

To order the kit please contact [The Healthy Dog Store](#) at 647-933-9034 or at fillmybowl@thehealthydogstore.ca and they will ship the products to you if you are unable to pick it up at their store.



Mercola also produce wonderful videos, all full of great information:

- Coconut oil: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ND8doiVSLDw>

- Itchy Paws: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDD9K_Ng-yw&feature=relmfu
- Canine Mange: http://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/archive/2012/10/15/mange-in-dogs.aspx?e_cid=20121015_PetsNL_art_1
- Skin Problems and Baths (parts 1&2): <http://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/archive/2009/07/14/allergies-and-skin-problems-what-can-you-do-to-help-your-itchy-pet.aspx>
- Vaccinations: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkZWjZPJrMI>
<http://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/archive/2010/03/31/high-cost-of-pet-vaccinations.aspx>
- Yeast infections: <http://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/videos.aspx>

So...to summarize....your Westie is itchy and you don't know what to do...

1. Call us...day or night...call us!
2. Take them to the Vet and get blood work done with thyroid panel. **Make sure when you get the results from the Vet you get a copy for your records**
3. Next....call us...day or night...call us and scan or fax us the results and lets chat about the findings. We can help to formulate a plan for you to discuss with your Vet.

We know Westies; we know what has worked for our breed and what has not. We have had great results with skin- we can help and walk you through what needs to be done. This is VERY fixable, we promise!

