

Hair Loss in Dogs

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Does your dog seem to be going bald? What does that mean? Is he sick? Why is it happening? And what, if anything, can you do about it?

There are lots of reasons why a dog can be bald or suffer from [hair loss](#) or alopecia.

Sometimes dog are born bald.

Some dogs, like the Mexican Hairless and the [Chinese Crested](#) breeds, are born with hardly any hair. In these dogs, the lack of hair is genetically determined and a desirable characteristic among proponents of the breed. It is no different than choosing a yellow Labrador over a chocolate Labrador.

Sometimes dogs just go bald.

Other dogs (like [Dachshunds](#), [Chihuahuas](#) and [Boston Terriers](#)) develop a pattern baldness or symmetrical thinning of their haircoat. This thinning is not present at birth but usually becomes apparent between 6 and 9 months of age and ultimately leads to complete baldness in the affected areas, [says the University of Prince Edward Island](#). It is important to note that pattern baldness is not a disease in need of treatment. Affected dogs are not uncomfortable or painful. It's like going gray or going bald for human beings. Not only is it not physically painful, but dogs do not even suffer emotionally from losing their hair like we might. There is no reason to treat or to change these entirely cosmetics disorders.

Sometimes canine hair loss is benign and temporary.

There are also transient reasons for hair loss. Just like people go through stages where they lose more hair, dogs do too. [Shedding](#) is a natural and normal process that can vary in degrees. Dogs that are sick or [stressed](#) for other reasons (illness, [fevers](#), [pregnancy](#), etc) can also 'blow coat' or shed excessively. Again, these are not conditions that demand treatment.

Sometimes the hair loss is medically important.

It is important, however, to consult your veterinarian if you are noticing any changes in your dog's coat or if he is developing bald areas. Sometimes hair loss **is** due to a medical problem that does require intervention since the underlying reason for it can cause more serious and systemic problems relating to your dog's overall health.

Your veterinarian will want to determine if your dog's hair is falling out on its own or if your dog is [scratching](#), licking or [chewing](#) the hair off as a result of some inflammation or irritation. This distinction can help to focus the diagnostic approach in your dog's case. Generally, if your dog is actively causing the hair loss, you and your veterinarian will be looking for causes of [dermatitis](#) or inflammation of the skin (like with [allergies](#)) or for infectious diseases like [bacterial](#), [fungal](#) or [parasitic](#) diseases (acne/pyoderma, [ringworm](#) or mange [mites](#)). In these cases, the answer may be found through skin scrapings, cytology, cultures or allergy testing; and appropriate therapy can result in hair re-growth.

Sometimes the hair loss is hormonal.

On the other hand, sometimes there just isn't any hair. Your dog is not itching or uncomfortable or pulling his own hair out. He is just losing his hair **because** of a larger problem. This type of hair loss is often the result of a hormonal disorder. [Hypothyroidism](#) (abnormally low thyroid hormone levels), [adrenal](#) gland dysfunction (Hyperadrenocorticism or [Cushing's Disease](#)), sex [hormone imbalances](#), and another hormone-like pattern of hair loss termed Alopecia X can all cause-varying degrees of hair loss and alopecia. Your dog's age, breed and the distribution of the hair loss along with any other clinical symptoms may make one or another of these conditions more likely. Your veterinarian will want to do specific diagnostic tests to know for sure. [Blood test](#) and even skin biopsies may be necessary in order to arrive at the definitive diagnosis.

In summary, hair loss or alopecia in dogs can be just a cosmetic issue or it can be due to a primary skin problem. It can also be an external indication of a more serious and systemic disorder. It's up to you and your veterinarian to work together to make that distinction.

Resources:

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[1. Flynn-Lurie, Alison. "NON-PRURITIC ALOPECIA IN THE DOG- A CASE BASED REVIEW." Miami Veterinary Specialists.](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.

