

Is coconut oil helpful for itchy dogs?

Coconut oil is a hot health trend right now, and it's being used in everything from cooking to candles to face moisturizers. Many pet owners mention that they've tried using coconut oil to relieve their dogs' itchy skin, but didn't see much help from it.

While topical coconut oil has been shown to be beneficial in human children with Atopic Dermatitis,¹ there is no scientific research available to evaluate its use in dogs. Clinically, I have not seen much benefit in my allergic canine patients. A reason for this may be due to the high prevalence of *Malassezia* (yeast) infections in dogs with skin allergies. Yeast is lipophilic, meaning it eats oil to survive. They especially like triglycerides, a special type of fat found in high concentrations in both olive oil and coconut oil.² In fact, olive oil is commonly added to *Malassezia* cultures when trying to grow it in the lab. Putting coconut oil on the skin may in fact be fueling secondary yeast infections!

There are oils that are specifically designed for topical use in dogs with allergic skin disease, such as Essential 6 Spot-On and Atop7 by Dermascent, Atopivet Spot-On by Dechra, and the Atopivet collar by Dechra. These products do not have high levels of triglycerides and do not appear to exacerbate yeast infections. They contain ceramides, which are a special type of fat that acts as the "cement" holding skin cells together. Studies have shown that dogs with skin allergies are lacking in ceramides and replenishing them with topical treatments may be helpful in controlling clinical signs.³ If you're looking for a safe, topical treatment to improve your dog's skin barrier, I would definitely recommend one of these canine products rather than coconut oil.

References:

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- 3) J Vet Sci. 2013;14(2):199-205. doi: 10.4142/jvs.2013.14.2.199. Epub 2013 Jun 21.
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