

# Incontinence

The pesky condition of "leaky" dogs is otherwise known as incontinence. Sometimes dogs, especially females, have a tendency to leak or dribble urine. This usually happens while they are sleeping and unaware of what is happening. You may notice that your dog wakes up embarrassed at what she has done. She should not be punished for having this kind of accident; it's not her fault!

Some breeds, such as Dobermans, commonly suffer from what has been termed "spay incontinence," which begins sometime after the spay surgery. There is no "usual" time period between the surgery and the onset of incontinence symptoms. Neither does there seem to be any link between the age of the dog when spayed, and the onset of symptoms; they may begin immediately or not until years later. It is a very individualized thing. Older dogs also tend to develop incontinence as a function of aging, regardless of breed or spay status.

It is very important that you rule out the possibility that your dog's incontinence is indicative of a bladder or urinary tract infection. Infections usually require medical treatment. An infection left untreated will not only bring your dog much discomfort, but it could turn into an even more serious health problem. Dietary changes can help prevent recurrence by building the proper pH in the body to ward off future attacks.

There is some thinking that spay incontinence cannot be helped by the usual methods that would be used to treat incontinence in unsplayed bitches (or males for that matter). However, it can't hurt to try! You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by at least trying to use some natural methods before resorting to harsh drugs and chemicals (like Phenylproanolamine [PPA] or Diethylstilbesterol [DES]) that may have long term, harmful effects. Besides, herbs are cheaper, a nice bonus!

The best herb to try is CORNSILK (*Zea mays*). Look for fresh (not dried) silk threads. These can be found in organic food stores, health food stores, or clipped directly from ears of corn, preferably organically grown. Cornsilk is safe for long term use. It may be combined with couchgrass and echinacea; this combination will help with inflammations or infections of the urinary tract. Another useful herb to try for treating incontinence is called UVA URSI.

Dosage: For a medium dog (~70 lbs) try about a teaspoon or so, or if you buy in capsules form, follow the label directions, using half the recommended dosage for humans. A lot of "natural" and herbal remedies are very individualized, and the amount needed by your dog may be different from the amount needed by my dog. This is even true with the good old standby PPA.

Another herbal mixture you can try is 2 parts horsetail, 1 part agrimony, and 1 part sweet sumach. This information is taken from a human herbal book, which recommends brewing this mixture as a tea and drinking 3 times a day. For dogs, we would either add to drinking water or mix into food. Unless of course they are willing to drink it.

If you live near a health food store, check and see if they have homeopathic remedies. There are some good remedies you can purchase for urinary incontinence, as well as herbal tinctures worth trying.

My final recommendation is to offer some diet advice. I highly recommend feeding a natural, home prepared diet, consisting of fresh, raw, human-grade meats, fruits, and vegetables. One "secret" that I discovered, which seems to have stopped one of my own dogs' incontinence and her reliance on the PPA, is to cut all grains out of the diet. Ever since doing this, I have also stopped giving the PPA, and she has stayed dry at night!

I cannot explain why this works, and certainly it may not work for every dog, but it has worked for others. I was skeptical, but figured why not try it. It has worked for us, that's the best "proof" I can furnish.

In closing, I leave you with this to ponder: You cannot eliminate grains from your dog's diet unless you give up commercially prepared dog foods. Yes, even the "premium" brands. They are based on grains, and contain far more than any dog requires. Did you know the dog has no established requirement for carbohydrates? Grains are carbohydrates. Food for thought!

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