

Allergies



Just like their owners, our pets can suffer from allergies. In fact allergic skin disease is by far the most common medical problem faced by pet owners.

However, where human allergy symptoms normally include sneezing, wheezing, runny nose and watery eyes, a dog's allergy symptoms are different. Often you will notice your dog constantly scratching, even to the point of bleeding. They may rub their face, lick their feet and generally scratch all over. You may see hair loss and skin damage, sometimes with secondary infections with an obvious smell and greasy, flakey or red skin.

Although canine allergies are not life-threatening, the itching that they cause can make your dog miserable.

What causes allergies?

All animals have an immune system – without it we wouldn't survive very long. It is our “border control” involving several different types of cells. Just like a customs officer they check the ‘passport’ of everything they encounter. If they perceive it as harmless, they move on. If it is seen as a threat they will attack without mercy.

In allergic animals, the immune system makes a mistake and goes crazy. It incorrectly targets a harmless protein in the environment and declares war. Antibodies are produced and whenever they encounter that antigen in the future (e.g. pollen, grass, mould, dust mites etc.) they cause the release of several nasty chemicals – the end result being a red itchy animal.

The Four Main Allergy Groups

It is important to realise that regardless of the cause, most allergies look the same – i.e. a red itchy dog. Unfortunately some itchy pets are allergic to two or more of the following.

- **Biting insect:** This is by far the most common cause and includes fleas and other biting insects such as sandflies and mosquitoes. Allergic dogs develop a sensitivity to the insect saliva which is injected into the skin by the insect when they bite. Any allergic dog should be on *comprehensive* flea control regardless of the main cause of their itch as the presence of fleas make it significantly worse. Usually affects the lower back and hind quarters at first.
- **Food allergy:** Normally occurs in younger dogs. Allergies commonly develop to the meat proteins or additives like preservatives and artificial colours. Symptoms are usually skin-related but may include vomiting and diarrhoea.

- **Atopy:** Can occur with flea allergy. Inherited and usually presents between 1-3 years of age. It works like human asthma, just targeting the skin. Usually seasonal (summer) at first and classic signs include chewing the paws, red itchy ears and belly. The allergens are invisible and airborne (e.g. pollens, dust mites, mould spores, etc.).
- **Contact Allergy:** Direct physical contact is necessary – e.g. lying on a particular patch of vegetation (for example Rhoeco or grass). Only the skin that touches it becomes red so normally the feet and belly/chest regions are visibly inflamed and itchy.

How do we find what my pet is allergic to?

In order to cure your pet we need to try and find the offending allergens and remove them entirely from his or her world. In the case of biting insects, food and contact allergy this may be possible. With atopy this may be unrealistic as the allergens are in the air.

Trials & Treatments

There are several trials we can do at home to help establish which group your pet is in. These trials need to be done **100% by-the-book** otherwise they will not be helpful. Also don't change *anything* else – the only difference must be the trial.

- **Biting insect trial:** Dogs only. Daily soaking with *Permaxin* (topical insecticide rinse) for 3 weeks. This will help rule out flea, mosquito and sandfly allergies. A significant improvement over this period indicates that biting insect allergy is the primary problem.
- **Biting insect allergy treatment:** Treatment involves complete elimination of biting insects from the dog's environment and the use of flea repellent products. Occasionally antibiotics or other treatments may be



required if secondary infections are present.

- **Food allergy trial:** 8 weeks on a hypoallergenic diet. Prescription foods (*Royal Canin Hypoallergenic*, *Hills Prescription z/d* or *Eukanuba FP*).
Food allergy treatment: Can often be diagnosed and controlled by use of a special diet. Occasionally antibiotics or other treatment may be required if secondary infections are present.
- **Contact Allergy:** If you suspect your pet is allergic to a plant in your garden, then break off a leaf and rub it on a hairless patch that is not already red. Watch for a rash appearing in 24-48hrs.
Contact allergy treatment: Treatment involves restricting access to the allergen causing substance,
- **Atopy trial:** This is usually done last if the other 3 trials are negative. A blood test to look for antibodies or referral to a specialist for intradermal skin testing can be organised. **Atopy treatment:** unfortunately it is almost impossible to avoid the common airborne allergens. Once diagnosed these pets usually require desensitisation to the offending substances. This is known as immunotherapy

Summary

Allergies are a common and frustrating problem that often requires time and patience to control. If the allergy occurs for only a few weeks of each year then a short course of treatment is often all that is needed. However, when the problem becomes severe and chronic, then we need to try to find out what is causing the reaction and go from there.



Allergy Treatment Plan

Food Allergy:

Your vet will recommend a special diet which will avoid the foods your dog might be allergic to. Your vet will assess your dog's improvement while on the diet and decide if food allergy is your pet's primary concern.

Feed only: (special diet)

for weeks. Do not give table scraps or titbits while on this special diet.

Return for a check-up on:

Biting Insect Allergy:

We need to stop the fleas and other biting insects from biting for 3 weeks. Your vet will then reassess the skin to decide if this allergy is the primary problem. Follow these instructions.

DOGS: Permethrin: dilute and apply as a rinse all over initially, then thoroughly spray your pet daily for 3 weeks (with diluted Permethrin).

CATS:
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.....
.....

Return for a check-up on:

Atopy:

Blood Test: Your vet will collect a small amount of blood from your pet to send to the pathology lab for allergy testing. This will identify which grasses, weeds, moulds or house dust mites are causing the allergy.

Skin Test: This test is usually done by a dermatologist to detect pollen, mould and mite allergies following a referral from your vet. Results are available immediately.

Skin Infections:

We have detected/suspect the following infections:

- bacteria
- yeast (*Malassezia pachydermatis*)
- ringworm

Use these topical medications to clear up the affected area:

- PAW Mediderm.....times per week
- Malaseb Medicated Foamtimes per week
- Pyohex Medicated Foam.....times per week
- Other.....

Your pet's infection requires systemic treatment as well, use these medications:

- Antibiotics:
-
- Other:.....
-

Antipruritics:

Due to the nature of your dogs itch, we will need to control the scratching with the following medications:

- Antihistamine:
-
- Corticosteroid:.....
-
- Other:.....
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Biting Insects:

- DOGS:**.....
-
- Alternative treatment:.....
-

- CATS:**.....
-
- Alternative treatment:.....
-

- Other Pets:**.....
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