

Allergies in Pets

By

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Atopy or allergic inhalant dermatitis or environmental allergies

Atopy is one of the most common causes of itching in dogs and cats. It is a result of an inherited predisposition to develop allergic reactions to environmental substances. These are the same allergens (dust mites, pollens, molds, insect particles and animal dander) that result in human allergic conditions such as hay fever or asthma. For most pets the condition is life-long and like hay fever or allergic asthma in humans it is not curable but can be managed to improve your pet's quality of life.

Breed predilection: Certain breeds have a higher incidence such as Golden Retrievers, Boxers, Labrador Retrievers, most terriers and Bichon Frise; however, any breed can be affected. Most common sign is itching and dogs will scratch, bite, lick, chew, roll, rub themselves and shake their heads. Infections, sores, rashes, and odor all result from this self-trauma and lead to secondary bacterial and or yeast infections. Areas most commonly affected are paws, face and ears, armpits and belly. Sometimes it will just be chronic ear infections. Signs can be seasonal or all year round

Diagnosis: Since the symptoms can present similarly to other itchy conditions such as parasitic diseases, infections, flea allergy and food allergy, diagnosis is based on typical history and clinical findings along with a blood test to rule out any and all underlying systemic diseases. Allergy testing is only used to determine treatment but is not used to diagnose. Intradermal testing will show what allergens your pet is allergic to and then used to formulate injection to hyposensitize the pet.

Treatment:

- Reduce exposure by removing them from environment if possible. Certain allergens such as wool, dust mites and animal dander can be decreased with environmental control
- Placing a t-shirt and or booties on your pet can help reduce the amount of exposure to allergens
- Use high efficiency particulate or HEPA air and charcoal filters to reduce pollens, molds, and dust in the home
- Treat infections with antibiotics
- Use medicated shampoos
- When dog goes outside have them wear t-shirt and or booties
- Add fatty acid supplement to the diet

- antihistamines
- steroids
- allergy shots

Flea Allergy

Common in both dogs and cats that are sensitized to a flea bite. It only takes one bite to set this off because certain fleas have a protein in their saliva that is put in the skin of the dog or cat when they bite them. Dogs and cats chew, scratch and lick at their skin. Often time's owners will never see a flea

Treatment

- Treat all pets in the household with flea treatment every 30 days
- Treat environment
- Antibiotics for secondary infection from self trauma
- Steroids

Food Allergy

Food Allergy can occur at any age and is common in dogs but does occur in cats as well. In most cases, a protein, such as chicken, lamb, beef or fish is the culprit, though any carbohydrate, fat or dietary supplement may be an allergen. The pet may have been eating the offending allergen for over two years before developing signs of a food allergy. Food allergy can occur at any age, in any breed and patients may be allergic to more than one item. It is characterized by non-seasonal itching that may or may not respond to steroids. Any are of the body may be affected and some animals will have intestinal problems as well. Vomiting, diarrhea, poor body condition and general malaise are all possible. Signs can be similar to those seen with atopy - Severe itching with self trauma leading to secondary skin infections and ear infections.

Diagnosis: Putting your pet on an elimination diet trial. This means that your pet will be fed a single new animal protein, one that your pet has not eaten before, such as rabbit or vegetable one such as beans; and a single new carbohydrate, such as yams or green peas and fed absolutely strictly for a period of 8 to 12 weeks to see improvement. No supplements or other foods can be fed during this time. If the pet improves after the 12 weeks the pet is rechallenged by offering back your pet's original diet and if symptoms return the diagnosis is made.

Treatment: The pet is fed a diet formulated to be a complete, nutritionally balanced diet without food ingredients that causes the allergies.

Mites, fungal infection and bacterial infections will all cause a dog or cat to scratch and chew at themselves and must be ruled out as well. Mites are ruled out by a skin scrape and fungal infections such as ringworm can be diagnosed using an ultraviolet light or DTM culture.