

Atopic Dermatitis (Environmental allergies)

Atopic dermatitis (allergic dermatitis, canine atopy) is an inherited predisposition to develop allergic symptoms following repeated exposure to some otherwise harmless substance, an "allergen," such as dust mites or pollen. Most pets begin to show their allergic signs between 1 and 3 years of age.

Atopic animals will usually rub, lick, chew, bite or scratch at their feet, muzzle, ears, armpits or groin, causing hair loss, and reddening and thickening of the skin. In some cases several skin problems can "add" together to cause an animal to itch where just the allergy alone would not be enough to cause itching. These problems include air borne-allergens (pollens, etc.), allergens in food, and allergens from parasites (fleas, etc.) and also bacterial or yeast infections of the skin. Eliminating some but not all of the problems may allow a patient's itchiness to go away. Therefore it is important to treat any other problems that could be making your pet itch while dealing with allergy.

Diagnosis = Allergy Testing Specific diagnosis of atopic dermatitis is based upon the results of intra-dermal testing and/or in vitro (blood) testing. Any given pet can have many things that it is allergic to. Once the allergens that are affecting the pet are identified, serial injections can be given to desensitize your pet. Allergy testing can be done through a veterinary dermatologist and we are fortunate to have Dr. Ashley (a veterinary dermatologist) right here in Springfield, here is her website = vetallergy.net/. In some cases we do allergy testing through our clinic. We take a serum sample and send it to a company called VARL. Here is their website = www.varlallergy.com/1.html



Fun pictures of one of our allergic patients



The Ducks have the best fans in the world!



Treatments for Atopy

Usually a combination of treatments are needed to control allergies. Allergen Specific Immunotherapy is the ideal treatment but sometimes is not necessary. Special hypoallergenic food is often helpful as well. Due to seasonal influences, the treatment needs often vary with the season.

1) Antihistamines: This medication works in 20% of atopic patients. Your pet can take antihistamines for life. The only side effect usually seen is drowsiness. Several types may be tried to find the one best for your pet. Topical antihistamines for the eyes can be helpful in patients with eye allergy (itchy conjunctivitis). Visine A® is one over-the-counter product that can be helpful.

2) Avoidance of the allergens: This can be helpful for house dust mite allergies. Pollen exposure can be reduced by using air-conditioning and air filters, avoiding the outside early morning and late afternoon, wiping down with moist cloths after going outside and frequent bathing.

3) Oral Steroids (*prednisone, cortisone, triamcinolone, etc.*): These drugs have many potential side effects and are reserved for adult animals, those with short seasonal problems or where other therapy is not possible or is ineffective. Typically, treatment is started at one dose and then tapered off to every other day usage.

4) Topical Steroids: Topical usage is safer than oral usage. It can be very helpful if itching is localized (*e.g.*, eyes, ears). It can be used for more widespread disease in the form of leave-on rinses, lotions, or sprays.

5) Cyclosporine: This immunosuppressive agent can be used at low doses to treat allergy successfully in about 60% of patients. It can also be used to lower needed dosages of steroids. The major short-term side effect is gastrointestinal upset. The long-term safety is not completely known. The dosage can often be lowered after a few weeks of successful treatment.

6) Fatty acid supplements: Certain types of oils can reduce allergic symptoms in some patients. We can give fish oil capsules in conjunction with a low-fat diet or prescribe special prescription diets with the fish oil content raised. This therapy can help improve response to antihistamine therapy.

7) Allergen Specific Immunotherapy: This involves giving an allergy desensitization injection that is made up specifically for your pet, usually for the lifetime of the animal. After an initial series of injections, periodic boosters will be needed (every 1-3 weeks). 60% to 80% of animals will improve with the desensitization injections. Results may not be seen for 3 to 6 months. When results are not seen in 9 to 12 months, a re-evaluation is necessary.

8) Bathing: Atopic skin is sensitive and subject to drying. Only specially designed hypoallergenic shampoos should be used on your allergic dog. Rinsing should be thorough. Generally it is best to follow with a hypoallergenic cream rinse or spray to re-moisturize the skin after every bath.

to view original/related article visit www.veterinarypartner.com/Content.plx?P=A&S=0&C=0&A=1535