



ALLERGIES IN DOGS AND CATS

Allergies are unfortunately a common diagnosis in dogs and cats. Allergy symptoms can include:

- Ear infections (recurrent)
- Licking of the feet/paws
- Chewing at the arms/legs, sides, or belly
- General signs of itch
- Secondary skin infection
- Loss of hair at the arms or abdomen (cats)

The top three most common causes of allergy symptoms in dogs and cats are:

- Environmental allergy (Atopy)
- Flea allergy dermatitis
- Food allergy

OVERVIEW

The history of the symptoms, patient characteristics, flea/tick preventative medication use, age of onset of symptoms, and seasonality of the symptoms together with physical findings can help diagnose what the likely underlying cause of the symptoms is. In general, all dogs and cats should receive flea/tick prevention when possible. It is imperative for any dog or cat with allergy symptoms to receive regular flea/tick prevention as doing so helps to eliminate a third of the possible likely causes! Flea allergy dermatitis is one of the top causes of allergy symptoms in dogs and cats. Fleas, flea dirt, and flea larva do not have to be seen to be the cause of the symptoms. A single flea bite can cause symptoms to persist for weeks at a time. Any pet as well as any other dogs or cats in the home should receive regular flea/tick prevention. Additionally, use of medications such as Bravecto effectively eliminate external parasites which further helps to improve the accuracy of a diagnosis.

Some unlucky pets can have multiple allergies (food and environmental allergy together as an example). Not uncommonly, pets with allergies can have secondary skin or ear infections that can worsen symptoms or cause previously effective treatments to fail. Identifying and addressing any secondary conditions, risk factors, or concurrent primary conditions is necessary to help improve treatment and management of allergies.



MANAGEMENT OF ALLERGIES

Effective management of allergies is dependent on:

- The accuracy of the diagnosis
- Identification and management of any secondary conditions
- The severity of the symptoms



PROGNOSIS WITH ALLERGIES

Allergies can be managed but not cured. Environmental allergies tend to get a bit worse after each season of exposure. Patients with risk factors for allergies and secondary conditions need more management. Understanding this is important. The management of pets with allergies can be frustrating, however knowledge of allergies (see above and below) can help alleviate the frustrating aspects of having a pet with an allergy. There is no “one-size-fits-all” way to diagnose and manage allergies. What works for one pet or their people may not work for another.

ENVIRONMENTAL ALLERGY (ATOPY)

Effective long-term management of environmental allergies generally is best achieved by a “multi-modal” approach meaning the condition is managed with a variety of treatments rather than relying on one or two treatments. Management options can include:

- Allergy vaccines (Allergen Specific ImmunoTherapy or ASIT)
 - This is the only way to directly blunt the overreaction of the immune system to environmental allergies. While allergy vaccine treatment must be life-long to be effective, it is the safest, most direct, and overall cost-effective management option.
- Symptomatic relief of itch
 - Cytopoint and Apoquel either individually or in combination can effectively reduce or eliminate the itch associated with allergies but do not directly affect the primary cause of the symptoms.
- Therapeutic skin diet
 - Dogs with environmental allergies can benefit from a therapeutic skin diet. This is a safe, holistic, and relatively easy way to manage allergies. Hydrolyzed protein diets such as Hills Derm Complete can also be effective in patients with both environmental and food allergy or when the diagnosis is not clear or definitive.
- Regular (twice weekly to weekly) bathing with a moisturizing shampoo intended for pets can safely help to reduce symptoms during seasons of allergy symptoms. There are many options for this. An oatmeal based shampoo is a common example.
- Skin health supplements intended to maintain the skin defenses are safe options to help prevent secondary skin and ear infections and keep the skin, coat, and ears in good health.
- Regular (weekly to twice weekly) ear cleanings during seasons of allergy can help to prevent ear infections which are typically symptoms of allergy. There are many effective maintenance ear cleaners available.



FLEA ALLERGY

Regular use of an effective flea preventative for the affected pet and any housemates should resolve the symptoms associated with flea allergy. As stated previously, flea allergy dermatitis is very common. Regular use of an effective flea preventative helps with the accuracy of a diagnosis of skin allergy in general and is strongly recommended for any pet with general skin allergy symptoms.

FOOD ALLERGY

Avoidance of the offending food allergy is the best way to manage the symptoms associated with a food allergy. The animal source of protein in the diet is the most common (~80%) cause of food allergy. The only way to definitively diagnose a food allergy is with a properly conducted food trial. A food trial is a relatively simple test however there are many ways for this test to fail. Coordination with a veterinarian is strongly recommended to help ensure a food trial is accurately assessed and interpreted.



OTHER THOUGHTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- The accurate diagnosis of an allergy is not easy. Oftentimes empiric trials with foods, treatments, and flea preventatives will be recommended, in part, to help lead to an accurate diagnosis.
- Management of allergies is generally lifelong, and the most effective way to manage the symptoms associated with allergies is through a multimodal (all hands on deck) approach.
- We are here to help! Allergies are a complicated process and we want to help you alleviate the symptoms and discomfort associated with allergies with your pet.

