

Allergies

Skin conditions related to allergies are the most common reason people bring their pet to the veterinarian. We understand allergies can be very frustrating. Common signs of allergies include itching, redness, ear infections, chewing or licking on their paws, hair loss, and scooting their rear (anal gland issues). You may have tried multiple shampoos, foods, OTC antihistamines, and creams to no avail. This is where we can help. With new developments in diets, drugs, and topical therapies, we have more tools to provide relief to your pet.

Since our pets cannot tell us what makes them itchy and when, we must eliminate the possible causes and then come up with the most effective treatment.

Parasites

Fleas and mites are one of the top reasons for a pet to itch. Fleas tend to reside on the back, near the tail base. You may notice hair loss in this area or your pet may often bite themselves there. We can test for fleas by running a flea comb over their skin and checking for “flea dirt”, which is flea droppings. Many animals are allergic to the saliva of fleas, so even if you don’t see them and there is not a full infestation, just 1 or 2 fleabites can cause an allergic response and major itching. Mites, such as Demodex or Sarcoptes, live in the hair follicles and may cause hair loss all over the body or just concentrated around the face and feet. To check for these parasites, we scrape the skin of the affected area and put the scrapings on a microscope slide to look for the offender.

We recommend all animals with potential allergies be on a flea and tick preventative, like Nexgard, Simparica, or Bravecto, year-round to rule out these potential causes.



Food Allergies

Food allergies are often due to the protein in the food, not to the grains as many companies and marketing ploys advertise. The top four most common allergens in dogs are beef, then chicken, then wheat, and finally dairy. In cats, the top four are beef, fish, chicken, and dairy products. To rule out food allergies, we recommend a food trial that lasts 8-12 weeks. In a food trial, your pet will only eat a prescription diet, no extra treats, or “people” food. While there are many over the counter diets that claim to be for allergies, the only diets we can use for a true food trial are hydrolyzed prescription diets.

Hydrolyzation means tiny water molecules are added to the proteins during processing to break them into smaller pieces. Research shows small proteins cause less of a reaction within the immune system than larger proteins. These diets also use limited and novel ingredients that most pets haven’t eaten before (like soy). Food options for trials are: Purina HA, Hill’s Z/D, Royal Canin Ultamino, or Royal Canin Hydrolyzed Protein.

Food trials are VERY strict. Your pet can only eat the diet, and cannot have ANY other treats, bones, or human food.

Environmental Allergies and Atopic Dermatitis:

When a dog has environmental allergies, their immune system over-reacts to normal environmental stimuli such as plant pollens, dust mites, molds, etc. This over-reaction is termed Atopic dermatitis, and is an inherited (genetic) disease that causes the skin to be less effective in preventing the absorption of allergens. Once the allergens are in the body, they cause itching, most commonly around the face, ears, armpits,

abdomen, feet, and anus. Typically, these types of allergies are seasonal and begin to appear in dogs 1-3 years old. However, environmental allergies can affect animals of all ages.

When dogs have Atopic Dermatitis, there are two routes of treatment:

- Find out exactly what is causing the allergic response. This involves either a blood test or intradermal skin testing just as they do in humans. Once we know what your pet is allergic to, immunotherapy injections can be formulated. These are small amounts of the specific allergens injected monthly to desensitize the body. Over time, typically 6-12 months, these injections change the immune system's response to the stimulus and we see a huge (if not complete) improvement in the clinical signs.
- Use medications that target a specific pathway in the immune system responsible for these symptoms. This method does not require determining the specific allergen.

With either of these choices, we would also recommend adding fish oil to your dog's diet to improve the skin barrier. It may also be necessary to use medicated shampoos to soothe inflamed skin.

Helpful tips and reminders:

Before we can begin to control and treat allergies, we first need to rule out any other outside causes of itching. Hormonal diseases, like low thyroid levels, can cause itching as well as secondary infections from bacteria and/or yeast. Skin infections are quite common since the immune system is compromised from fighting off allergens. We frequently see these infections occur in the ears and on the underbelly. To rule out these causes, we run blood work and look at a sample of the skin under the microscope (cytology).

Finally, it's important to remember that allergies and Atopic Dermatitis are never truly "cured". These are chronic diseases, and our goal is to alleviate the symptoms and keep your pet as comfortable as possible.