

ALLERGIC DERMATITIS GENERAL INFORMATION

(Information Provided by Courtesy of: ST. BETHLEHEM ANIMAL CLINIC | 400A Warfield Blvd. Ct. | Clarksville, TN 37043)

Sometimes a severe reaction occurs between a substance and the immune system of the body. This is called an "ALLERGIC REACTION," and may be caused by dust, weeds, molds, grass, pollens, wool, FOODS, FLEAS, as well as many other substances.

Allergies are an abnormal response of the body's immune system to a particular substance. Allergies are often inherited. **ALLERGIES ARE A LIFE-LONG DISORDER. THEY CAN NOT BE CURED, ONLY MANAGED AND MAY RECUR THROUGHOUT THE PET'S LIFE.**

In humans, the reaction that occurs usually affects the respiratory system, causing runny nose, watering eyes, and breathing problems--such as asthma.

A DIFFERENT type of reaction usually occurs in the body of the dog and cat resulting in the MAJOR sign usually being ITCHING. Signs of allergy include itching, licking the paws, chewing, chronic diarrhea pawing at the face, and recurrent ear infections. The itching causes the pet to chew and scratch; which, in turn causes more damage to the skin. The skin often becomes infected or thickened from prolonged chewing and scratching. Ear infections are often the result of allergy as well. The lining of the ear canal is merely an extension of the skin and therefore it is a localized form of skin allergy. It has been estimated that 70% of all ear infections have allergy as the underlying cause.

Some allergic reactions occur as soon as exposure occurs, but **most skin reactions are DELAYED and do not become clinically evident** for 3-7 days after the exposure. This makes determination of the causative agent very difficult. Often a pet that develops an allergy will develop additional allergies later in life, which makes control even more frustrating at times.

An ALLERGY **NEVER** develops the first time exposure occurs. It takes **TIME** for the body to become sensitized to a particular substance resulting in the development of an allergy. **This is the reason many pets do NOT develop an allergy until the later years of life.**

The most COMMON causes of allergy in the dog and cat is from ATOPY (inhaled allergies), FOOD ALLERGIES, and the RESULT OF FLEA BITES! In the case of flea bite allergy, the pet becomes allergic to the PROTEIN in the SALIVA of the flea. The reaction CAN occur after **ONLY ONE FLEA BITE!!** Many times there will be NO fleas on the pet when it is examined, which causes the owner to question the diagnosis. **Remember--MOST ALLERGIC REACTIONS OCCUR 3-7 DAYS AFTER THE EXPOSURE TO THE ALLERGENIC SUBSTANCE.**

Allergies are NOT PREVENTABLE; but CONTROL with medications is effective, PROVIDED the pet owner will follow our instructions and continue the treatment needed for control. YOU must be PATIENT and REALIZE that the condition PROBABLY WILL RECUR throughout the pet's life, if and when exposure occurs.

The SECRET is to get proper medical attention as soon as signs of allergy are seen. Prompt treatment will prevent the skin lesions from becoming more severe.

One INITIAL RECOMMENDATION is to control flea infestation. Fighting fleas is a constant war because:

1. The flea's life cycle can involve more than one year's time.
2. Most of the life cycle of the flea occurs OFF the pet.
3. Premises may be contaminated with fleas from other animals.

Fleas must be kept off the pet to control the allergic reaction. The recent introduction of new, much more effective, flea products such as **FRONTLINE TOPSPOT™**, has helped tremendously. Treatment of the house and yard is sometimes still necessary in areas highly infested with fleas.

Once flea allergy is eliminated or controlled, then you can move on to other aspects of the problem--such as food allergy, contact allergy, and inhaled allergies. If the flea allergy can be controlled, it then becomes much easier to

control the other problems in most cases. "Allergy testing" in dogs with recurrent allergies or those that have allergies all year long may be recommended.

FOOD ALLERGY accounts for 10-120% of allergic skin disorders in pets. A food allergy is an adverse reaction to either the protein source or additives in the diet. Protein sources that most often cause allergic reactions include beef, dairy products, fish, chicken, egg products, soy, and wheat. The process of cooking these ingredients makes them more potent antigens.

Food allergies commonly present as a non-seasonal itching and/or diarrhea. Food allergy can sometimes cause chronic vomiting as well. The most common signs are licking/gnawing at the feet, pawing or rubbing the face on the floor, and itching of the groin area, rump, and ears.

Many pets with food allergy also have atopy (inhaled allergies) as well. *The only test that can confirm a food allergy is a strict food trial.* **Your veterinarian will recommend the diet he/she feels is most appropriate for your pet.**

PRINCIPLES OF TREATING FOOD ALLERGY

1. The diet must be a novel protein, which is a protein that the pet has never eaten and is highly digestible.
2. Bacterial and/or yeast infections must be treated & resolved.
3. It may take 3-6 months to see improvement.
4. All treats including such things as raw hides, bones, pig/cow ears, chewable heartworm preventive, fatty acid supplements, and flavored medications must not be offered to the pet. The pet must NOT eat anything other than the novel diet!
5. If the pet responds and signs of allergy decrease signs may return or increase in 10-14 days if the causative agents are again fed.

ATOPY (Air-Borne Allergies). Inhaled allergies tend to be seasonal with itching occurring primarily in the spring, summer, & fall. However, if the allergen is something within the house, such as dust mites or carpet cleaners, the itching may be year-round. Common allergens include pollens (ragweed & grasses are the worst), mold spores, house dust, feathers, & dander.

Some pets need only be treated during specific times of the year when a specific antigen is in the air. However many pets develop multiple allergies and itch for long periods of time when exposed to any one of the offending substances.

BLOOD TESTING is now a reliable way of determining the specific antigens causing the allergy. Once these allergens are identified, sometimes it is possible to eliminate exposure allowing itching to stop. However many pets have multiple allergens making it very difficult to eliminate them from the pet's environment. Although the lab tests are not inexpensive, this is the best way to identify the causative agents and better planning of the treatment protocol.

In cases of multiple antigen allergy, **DESENSITIZATION** may be attempted to help the pet's immune system become less sensitive to these substances. This form of therapy is beneficial in approximately 70% of atopy cases with the result of far less itching. Improvement often takes 3-6 months and will be required for the rest of the pet's life. This is the best treatment method for pets when it works and also the most cost-effective. The goal of desensitization is to minimize the amount of corticosteroids needed to keep the pet comfortable and minimize signs of allergy.

HOW YOU CAN HELP CONTROL AIR-BORNE ALLERGIES

1. Provide your pet an air-conditioned environment with allergy air filters in the air returns.
2. Use dehumidifiers to help reduce growth of molds & mites in the house.
3. Clean up the home. Dusting & vacuuming often, as well as steam cleaning carpets, can help reduce antigen levels in the home.
4. Bathe your pet 1-2X / week using specific hypoallergenic shampoos we recommend to remove allergic substances that may get on the skin. **DO NOT USE OTC "allergy shampoos!"**
5. For pets that lick the feet, rinse the feet when they come indoors.
6. Provide pet bedding that can be washed frequently.
7. Do not keep the pet in basements, bathrooms, or laundry rooms. These are areas where there are high levels of mold allergens.

ALLERGIC SKIN DISEASE THERAPY

Allergic Skin Disease Medication must be individualized to your particular pet's clinical signs and causes of the allergic reaction.

- () **Wait 48 hours before bathing pet if FRONTLINE TOPSPOT™ drops have been applied.**
- () **Scrub in Medicated Shampoo and leave on skin ten (10) minutes before rinsing.**
Repeat every 7-10-14 days. Scrub in well--remember it is a skin problem--not a hair problem!
Always Use COOL Water to decrease itching.
- () **Apply DIP or RINSE Solution as directed.** (Use COOL Water)
[] Rinse Thoroughly [] Rinse Lightly [] Do NOT Rinse. Let Drip Dry!
- () **Apply FRONTLINE TOPSPOT™ 48 Hours After Bath. Do NOT Bathe For 48 Hours AFTER Application For Best Long-Acting Results.**
- () **Spray LIGHTLY with prescribed Coat Conditioner once daily- rub in well.**
Don't overuse. (Do NOT Apply 48 Hours Before Or After TOPSPOT™ Application)
- () **Give ____ tablets / capsules every _____ hours for itching.**
- () **Give ____ tablets / cc's orally every _____ hours for bacterial skin infection.**
- () **Apply FRONTLINE TOPSPOT™ ONCE Each Month For Flea & Tick Control.**
- () **Recheck in _____ days.**
- () **Treat House and Yard at least once each month for flea control.**
House must be treated every 7 - 14 days for 6 weeks if a severe flea problem exist.
- () **Observe the pet's stool for any sign of tapeworms, which are spread by fleas.**
Tapeworms pass short, white segments in the stool which look similar to rice.
- () **Give OFA fatty acid / zinc supplement as directed.**
- () **Lab results on thyroid function will be available in about 1 week.**
We will call you with the results when available.
- () **Fungal culture results usually take 10-14 days.**
We will call you with the results when available.
- () **Notify the clinic if your pet's condition recurs following treatment, if scratching continues for more than five (5) days, if skin appears infected, or your pet does not look healthy.**
- () **Feed only HIGH QUALITY FOOD.** PREMIUM foods often will solve the problem when food allergies are involved.

Specific Diet: _____
- () **Treat all other pets for fleas.** (Use FRONTLINE TOPSPOT™ on ALL Pets.)
- () **Consider Allergy Testing & for Recurrent Cases.** Many cases can be helped significantly.
- () **Do NOT Apply Any Other Medications To The Skin Without Checking With Us.**
- () **Return IMMEDIATELY any time you see your pet's condition worsen. The sooner we get the appropriate therapy started the easier it is to get the problem under control at the least cost to you.**