



ALLERGIES

There are three major allergies that cause discomfort in our pets. No matter the type, it is important to understand they are not cured but rather managed. Many products and practices are available that will give your pet long lasting relief and finding what works best is the goal. It does require continuous attention and care on your part, but they truly appreciate it! Allergies will not just “go away” they must be managed and can be frustrating for all three parties involved: pet, owner, and veterinarian. Hopefully this article gives valuable insight and hope for managing your pet with allergies.

After all other disease processes (mange, auto-immune diseases, cancer, etc.) are ruled out and allergies have been diagnosed, pet relief is the goal. The three main allergies are: Flea Allergy Dermatitis, Atopic Dermatitis, & Food Allergy. All present and are managed differently. This article describes them separately and gives tips on their management.

Flea Allergy Dermatitis (FAD):

FAD is extremely common and may be worse in warmer areas as the winters are not cold enough to kill fleas as seen in colder areas. This makes flea allergy dermatitis a year-round issue in warm areas. Signs typically start when pets are less than 6 months old. They are allergic to the saliva of the flea bite and react by becoming extremely itchy on their back around their tail head that may progress to their groin and inner thighs. Pets may have red irritated skin, hair loss and secondary skin infections that present with scale and pustules. Many times, the flea is not seen, but one bite sets off the reaction. Mainstay treatment includes routine hypoallergenic flea prevention for ALL pets in the household and treatment of the environment. Ninety-five percent of the flea life cycle is in the environment making it extremely important to vacuum routinely emptying it each time in an outside trash can and spraying the yard & home.

Food Allergy (FA):

Food allergy is a reaction to specific proteins or grains in food and can develop between 6 months to 3 years of age. Pets are itchy around their face, ears, abdomen, and will lick their feet. They may have red irritated skin with hair loss and may have secondary infections on the skin that present with scale and pustules. Management of FA is feeding a strict diet with a novel protein like duck, rabbit, venison, salmon, lamb, etc. Because they are in most commercial diets, avoid beef, chicken and pork as many pets have developed allergies to these proteins. Certain grains can cause issues in some pets but are not common. Diagnosis of FA is a favorable response to a food trial with a hypoallergenic diet. Noticeable results may take 4-6 weeks. Maintain a strict diet to avoid reactions. One treat will set off a reaction!! Novel protein diets may include Lamb, Rabbit, Turkey, Salmon, Duck, Venison, Elk, Kangaroo, Alligator, Soy.

Chicken-by-products may be used in novel diets as binding agents in the manufacturing process and are usually fine. A cost effective commercially available novel protein diet is Purina ONE Lamb/Rice

Hydrolyzed protein diets are more aggressive and typically contain hydrolyzed soy. Most are by prescription only.

A few examples are Purina HA, Royal Canin HP and Hill's Science Diet Z/D.

All oral medications must be hypoallergenic and can be given in hypoallergenic food or alternate options include marshmallows, rice crispy treats, bananas, strawberries, almond butter, etc.

Recommended hypoallergenic heartworm and flea preventions are Proheart and Bravecto, respectively.

Environmental / Atopic Dermatitis (AD):

Atopy is an allergy to the environment including but not limited to grasses, molds, pollens, tree bark, ragweed, dust mites, carpet mites, etc. Signs usually develop between 6 months to 3 years of age. Short of putting your pet in a glass bubble, there is no way to fully limit exposure to the problem allergens as in FAD and FA. This makes AD extremely difficult to manage. Depending on the allergen, the clinical signs may be seasonal or nonseasonal. Signs you will notice are the same as FA, itching around the face, ears, abdomen and licking the feet. They may have red irritated skin with hair loss and may have secondary infections on the skin that present with scale and pustules. Atopic dermatitis causes continual compromise of the skin barriers further complicating the problem with development of skin and ear infections. There is allergy testing available but has mixed results. Many owners get frustrated with the cost and lack of improvement. Hepa filters in the house may reduce allergen counts for indoor pets.

After an allergy diagnosis, the main goals are to reduce allergen exposure and re-establish skin integrity to provide comfort, safely. No matter the type of allergy diagnosed, treating all three is ideal as many pets can have sub-clinical allergies to all three. Therefore, all allergy pets should be on a hypoallergenic flea prevention, hypoallergenic diet and reduced exposure to environmental allergens.

Allergy Medications:

Antihistamines - (Zyrtec, Claritin, Benadryl, Chlor-Trimeton, Hydroxyzine) are safe and inexpensive but do not work as well as steroids or selective cytokine inhibitors.

Steroids - (Prednisone, Dexamethasone, Depo Medrol, Temaril-P, Triamcinolone) work well for FAD and AD and are relatively inexpensive, but long-term use has many side effects.

Selective Cytokine Inhibitors - (Apoquel, Cytopoint) are a newer class of medications that work well for FAD, AD and FA and have fewer side effects than steroids and immunosuppressants but are moderately expensive.

Pets produce a protein called a cytokine (IL-31) in response to exposure to allergens. This protein (IL-31) binds to a receptor in the tissues that causes itching and inflammation. Selective Cytokine Inhibitors work on both the protein (IL-31) and the itch receptor to give our pets safe, long-term relief from allergies.

Cytopoint – Detects and eliminates the “itch” cytokine (IL-31) in the bloodstream. Injection given every 30-60 days.

- An injection is given every 30 days if used as a sole treatment.

- An injection is given every 60 days if used as a combination treatment with Apoquel.

Apoquel – Attaches to and blocks the “itch” receptor in the tissues. Pill given daily.

Cytopoint and Apoquel can be used alone, but for best results, use together is recommended.

One protocol is to give a Cytopoint injection and fill 60 days of Apoquel. Use the Apoquel script as a timing marker.

When out of Apoquel, return for a Cytopoint injection and Apoquel refill. Stay on this 2-month protocol lifelong for best results.

Alternate Therapies - (Immunotherapy Injections, Fluoxetine, Misoprostol, Pentoxifylline, Cyclosporin) In some instances, with severe allergies or if there appears to be a behavior component, there are alternate medications that may be used to give the pet comfort. Use of these is limited due to side effects, cost and lack of response.

Antibiotics/Antifungals:

Because the integrity of the skin is compromised with allergies, bacteria and yeast can start to overgrow and complicate the issues. Ear and skin infections are extremely common secondary problems and must be addressed to get the best results. Antibiotics and/or antifungals are used to clear these infections. Treatment for a minimum of one month is required with severe infections possibly taking several months to obtain resolution. There are several systemic and topical medications and use is selected on a case-by-case basis.

Antibiotics: Convenia, Simplicef, Cephalexin, Clavamox, Clindamycin, Baytril, Ciprofloxacin, Zenequin, Bactrum, etc.

Antifungals: Ketoconazole, Terbinafine, Fluconazole, Itraconazole, Miconazole, etc.

Topical Products:

Medicated and oatmeal shampoos aid in skin health and offer short term relief. Bathing 1-2 times a week provides the best results. All shampoos must stay on the pet for 5-10 minutes to allow sufficient contact time to work. Daily baths are not recommended and can strip natural oils from the skin. Medicated shampoos are used to treat topical infections, oily skin and scale. Oatmeal shampoos and conditioners are used to soothe the skin and give short term relief.

Topical sprays also give short term relief. These are great for pets that do not like baths or can be used in conjunction with baths. Topical sprays can also be used for relief in between baths.

Oral Supplements:

Fatty acid supplements are extremely helpful with all three types of allergies and add much needed essential oils back to the skin to help with its integrity. Fatty acid supplementation is recommended for all allergy pets and is available in liquids, pills or may be found in hypoallergenic diets. Other skin support products are available and provide benefits to support skin integrity. These should be selected on a case-by-case basis.

Hopefully this article has given a little insight into allergies and some of the things available to manage them. It can't be stressed enough the importance that allergies are managed, not cured, and therefore require continuous treatment and care. There are several products out there to give pets relief, and with owners' continued dedication, they can live a long, happy, healthy and comfortable life!!!