



勝利動物醫院
Victory Animal Hospital

Victory Animal Hospital

Blk B, 1/F, Chung Yuen Mansion, 71b Waterloo Rd., Kln, Hong Kong

Phone: 852 2711 0332

Email: info@globavet.com

Allergy in Dogs / Cats

What is an allergy?

An *allergy* is a state of over-reactivity or hypersensitivity of the immune system to a particular substance called an *allergen*. Most allergens are *proteins*.

The allergen protein may be of insect, plant or animal origin. Exposure to the allergen, usually on multiple occasions, sensitizes the immune system, and a subsequent exposure to the same or related allergen causes an over-reaction, which can actually be harmful to the body.

What are the symptoms of allergies in animals?

The most common symptom associated with allergies is itching of the skin, either localized (in one area) or generalized (all over the body). In some cases, the symptoms involve the respiratory system, with coughing, sneezing, and/ or wheezing. Sometimes, there may be runny discharge from eyes or nose. In other cases, the allergic symptoms affect the digestive system resulting in vomiting and diarrhea.



Unfortunately, allergies are quite common in animals of all breeds and backgrounds. Most allergies appear after the pet is six months of age with the majority of affected animals over age two.

Are allergies inherited?

Some allergies are inherited. The inherited trait is known as *Atopy*.

What are the common allergy-causing substances (allergens)?

A very large number of substances can act as allergens. Most are proteins of insect, plant or animal origin, but small chemical molecules can also cause allergy. Examples of common allergens are pollens, mold spores, dust mites, shed skin cells (similar to "pet allergies" in humans), insect proteins such as flea saliva, and some medications.

What are the different types of allergy?

Allergies can be categorized into 4 common types, contact, insect, atopy and food.

Contact Allergy?

Contact allergy is the least common type of allergy in animals. It results from direct contact to allergens, such as pyrethrins found in flea collars, pesticides used on the lawn, grasses, materials such as wool or synthetics used in carpets or bedding, etc.

"...there will be skin irritation and itching at the points of contact..."



If the animal is allergic to these substances, there will be skin irritation and itching at the points of contact, usually the feet and stomach. Removal of the allergen (once it can be identified) often solves the problem.

Flea or Insect Bite Allergy and how is it treated?

Insect bite allergy is the exaggerated inflammatory response to the bite or sting of an insect.

Flea saliva is the most common insect allergen. Most dogs experience minor local irritation from fleabites. **The allergic animal will react to a single bite with severe local itching.** It will bite and scratch itself and may remove large amounts of hair, especially in the tail-base region. The area most commonly involved is over the rump in the tail-base region and extending down the hind limbs. Cats may be very similar, but also may have numerous small scabs around the head and neck.



Because one flea can be a problem for the allergic dog, strict flea control is essential. Your veterinarian can give you tips on protecting your animals from fleas. When strict flea control is not possible, or in cases of severe itching, your veterinarian may prescribe medications (steroids) to block the allergic reaction and give relief. If a secondary bacterial infection is present, an appropriate antibiotic will be prescribed.

Atopy and how is it treated?

The main inhalant allergens are tree pollens (cedar, ash, oak, etc.), grass pollens, weed pollens (ragweed), molds, mildew, and house dust mites. Many of these allergies occur seasonally, such as ragweed, cedar, and grass pollens. However, others such as molds, mildew, and house dust mites occur year-round. When humans inhale these allergens, the allergy manifests mainly with respiratory signs – runny eyes, runny nose, and sneezing ("hay fever"). Although sometimes the symptoms of allergies include allergic rhinitis or bronchitis, in most pets the allergy manifests mainly with itchy skin (pruritus). Due to these clinical signs, the condition is also called "Inhalant Allergic Dermatitis". Your pet may rub its face, lick its feet and scratch the axillae (underarms).

"Symptoms of atopy can be controlled but a permanent cure is not usually possible."

Most animals that have inhalant allergy start showing signs between one and three years of age. Affected pets will often react to several allergens. If the offending allergens can be identified by intradermal skin tests (skin testing) or IgE allergy tests (blood tests), the pet should be protected from exposure to them as much as possible. Because most of these allergens are environmental, this is difficult and recurrent bouts are likely. Symptoms of atopy can be controlled but a permanent cure is not usually possible.

Treatment depends largely on the length of the specific allergy season. It may involve one or more of the following three therapies:

Anti-inflammatory therapy.

Shampoo therapy. Frequent bathing with a hypoallergenic shampoo can be soothing.

Hyposensitization therapy. If the specific offending antigens are identified by allergy testing, an allergy injection serum or "allergy shots" can be given to the patient.

Food Allergy and how is it treated?

Food allergy or *food hypersensitivity* can develop to almost any protein or carbohydrate component of food. It most commonly develops in response to protein of the food of a particular food origin; dairy products, beef, wheat gluten, chicken, chicken eggs, lamb, and soy are commonly associated with food allergies in animals. Food allergy can develop at almost any age. Food allergy may produce any of the clinical signs previously discussed including itching, digestive disorders, and respiratory distress. But the most common sign is itchy skin, vomiting or diarrhea. A dog may have multiple types of allergy, such as both food allergy and atopy. Cats in particular develop allergies to food they have eaten for a long time.



"Food allergy does not respond well to corticosteroids or other medical treatments."

Food allergy does not respond well to corticosteroids or other medical treatments. Treatment requires identifying the offending component(s) of the diet and eliminating them. The most accurate way of testing for food allergies is with an elimination diet trial using a hypoallergenic diet.

"If the diet is not fed exclusively, it will not be a valid test."

Caution:

The symptoms of allergies can be confused with other disorders, or occur concurrently with them. Therefore, do not attempt to diagnose your dog without veterinary professional assistance. Be prepared for your pet to receive a full diagnostic evaluation to rule out other causes. If an allergy is diagnosed, your whole family must follow your veterinarian's advice very closely in order to successfully relieve your pet's discomfort.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM

© Copyright 2009 Lifelearn Inc. Used and/or modified with permission under license.