



ENVIRONMENTAL & SEASONAL ALLERGIES

One of the most common conditions veterinarians see in their practice is also one of the most frustrating. Allergies. Any pet owner who suffers from allergies themselves can certainly understand the misery that allergies can cause their pets. While allergies can plague both pets and people year-round, they are usually a seasonal problem. There are dozens of different items that we breathe in or come into contact with that may trigger allergies, and these pollens and proteins come and go from day to day, week to week and season to season. Local weather forecasters often include a "Pollen Index" as a warning to allergy sufferers.

Typically, Autumn is our worst season for allergies in North Carolina (with Spring not far behind) due to the active pollen from weeds combined with allergies to house dust, molds and mildews (particularly after the high humidity of summer) and the presence of fleas. No wonder so many of our pets suffer more during September and October than any other season.

What Effect Do Allergies Have

Many pet owners are surprised to discover that pets are allergic to the exact same things that people are. So why do pets scratch, bite, lick and chew while people have problems with congestion and runny eyes and noses? Quite simply, one key factor (among many factors) is a mast cell. These mast cells within our body contain histamine. Whenever a pet or person has a sensitivity to a particular allergen (anything that triggers an allergy such as pollens, house dust, etc.) and the allergen makes contact with that mast cell, the mast cell then ruptures and releases histamine. This histamine release leads to a series of events that result in the miserable effects of allergies. Since the effect is the same in people and pets, the only difference is the location of these mast cells. In people, mast cells are mainly found in the upper air passages and sinus areas of the face. That's why we sniffle and sneeze and get congested. In pets, the mast cells are located mostly in the skin, and that's why our dogs and cats scratch, bite, lick and chew. Since the mast cells release histamine, one way we can find relief is by using an anti-histamine !

There Are No Cures for Allergies !

It is critical for clients to understand one very important fact: **There are no cures for allergies ! Our goal is to control and manage the allergies** and relieve the misery associated with them. This is true for both pets and people.

The Seasonality of Allergies

As mentioned before, there is a strong seasonal nature to allergies.

- **Spring** is a time for pollens from **flowers and trees**.

- **Summer** is a time for **grass** allergies.

- **Autumn** is a time for allergies to **weeds** (ragweed, goldenrod, etc), **and fleas** are typically at their peak.

And, of course, there can be an overlap of these seasons. And there are also many other allergens that can be potentially year-round problems: **house dust & dust mites, fleas, cigarette smoke, molds and mildews, feathered pillows and comforters, wool in fabrics, kapok stuffing in furniture, and even food allergies** (which require a totally different method of management). So you can see that there are endless sources of allergies for both pets and people.

Controlling Allergies

While we cannot cure allergies, there are a number of things we can do to help provide your pet with relief.

*** FOR MILD ALLERGY CASES (Mild itchiness ... no loss of hair ... mild skin irritation)

Frequent "Sponge Baths": If there is one simple, but powerful strategy I recommend for every pet with allergies, this would be the one thing I would do over and over again ! This simple procedure can really make a difference for indoor pets, but it requires a little effort and a disciplined pet owner. Quite simply, every time your pet goes outdoors and comes back inside, take a clean, damp cloth (dampened with WATER ONLY --- do not use Baby Wipes) and give him / her a **full-body wipe-down**, focusing attention on the feet (tops and bottoms), the chest and belly, the hind end, and the face, nose and neck. Our strategy is to wipe off many of the pollens and allergens that get onto the fur and work their way to the skin, and then migrate into the body where they will contribute significantly to the effects of allergies. Removing them as soon as possible can greatly help your pet. Also, we find that **putting a t-shirt or clothing on your pet** when it goes outside can be extremely beneficial as well.

Antihistamines: Antihistamines work best when the itching is mild ... when bacterial and fungal infections are under control ... and when fatty acid supplements (see next page) are given at the same time. **Since there are different types of antihistamines, if one doesn't work after 5 to 7 days, then try a different one.** Dogs do not absorb antihistamines very well, and usually need to be given higher doses compared to humans. Here are several over-the-counter (OTC) products that are well worth trying.

- 1) **Allegra (Fexofenadine) 60mg Tablet** - Dogs: 1 to 2 mg per lb **once a day**
 - * Toy dogs 1/2 tablet (30mg total) daily
 - * Small dogs 1 tablet (60mg total) daily
 - * Medium dogs 1 1/2 tablet (90mg total) daily
 - * Large Dogs 2 tablets (120mg) daily
- 2) **Claritin (Loratadine) 10 mg Tablet** - Dogs: Give 1 mg per 5 lbs of body weight **once a day**
 - * Toy dogs (5-15 lbs) 1/4 tablet daily
 - * Small dogs (15-25 lbs) 1/2 tablet daily
 - * Medium dogs (25-50 lbs) 1 tablet daily
 - * Large Dogs (50-75 lbs) 1 1/2 tablets daily
- 3) **Tavist (Clemastine) 1.34 mg Tablets** - Cats: 1/4 to 1/2 tablet (use 1.34mg tablet) once a day
 - * Toy Dogs (5-15 lbs) - 1/4 tablet every 12 hours (twice a day)
 - * Small dogs (15-25 lbs) - 1/2 tablet twice daily
 - * Medium dogs (25-50 lbs) - 1 tablet twice daily
 - * Large dogs (50-70 lbs) - 1 to 2 tablets twice daily
- 4) **Zyrtec (Cetirizine) 5mg and 10 mg tablets**
 - * Toy dogs (5-15 lbs) - One 5 mg tablet once a day
 - * Medium/Large dogs (40+ lbs) - 10 mg twice daily
 - * Small / Medium dogs (15-40 lbs) - One 10 mg tablet once a day
- 5) **Hydroxyzine (Vistaril) 10 mg - 25 mg - 50 mg (Requires a Prescription) ~ somewhat similar to Zyrtec**
 - Dogs: 1 mg per pound of body weight 2 to 3 times per day (Ex. 25 lb dog gets a 25 mg tablet 2 or 3 times a day)

What about **Benadryl** (Diphenhydramine) ??? I find that Benadryl is rarely helpful for stopping itching, but can be useful for dogs with sinus issues (runny eyes and nose and sneezing). Give 1 mg per pound of dog's weight 2 to 3 times daily (Ex. A 25 lb dog gets 25mg 2 or 3 times daily). For mildly irritated, runny eyes, you can try **Alaway** drops, available at any pharmacy.

Flea Control: Certainly, if your pet has fleas, eliminating the fleas can significantly improve the itching. Ask us for details on flea control and flea products, or ask for / read my handout for best results.

Antimicrobial Therapy: Bacterial infections of the skin (pyoderma) and Yeast infections are commonly seen in allergic pets and may be a significant source of itching. Yeast infections in particular can be extremely itchy and irritating, not to mention contributing a peculiar 'Frito' odor to the skin. **We have available Keto-C Skin Wipes ~ apply daily to affected areas.** For best results, be sure to wipe it on vigorously. **We also have Keto-C-Tris Ear and Skin Flush** which, when applied routinely to affected areas of the skin, can effectively treat both yeast and bacterial infections.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids / Fish Oils: **Every itchy pet should get extra Omega-3's in the form of fish oils !** But you must give adequate doses to help relieve itching. Unfortunately, many available Omega-3 pet products do not recommend the correct dose, so many pet owners don't see any benefits. So here is how to measure the proper dose ...

* **All that matters when dosing Fish Oils is the amount of EPA + DHA** ... not just the quantity of Fish Oil in the product !

* Pets need **30 to 35 mg per pound of body weight of combined EPA + DHA daily.**

* For the correct dose, **add the EPA + DHA listed on the label.** Example: A container listing 180 mg EPA + 120 mg DHA on the label = 300 mg TOTAL. This 300 mg would be the correct dose for a 10 pound dog. A 20 lb dog should get combined EPA + DHA of 600 mg to 700 mg each day. A 50 lb dog would get a combined 1500 mg to 1750 mg per day ... and so on.

* Alternatively, you can give your pet either wild caught salmon, anchovies or sardines daily. Flax and chia seeds have Omega-3's, but are virtually unavailable as a source of Omega-3's in dogs, and not usable at all for cats, so they won't help much at all.

* **We carry 2 different veterinary formulations of Omega-3 supplements: "Free Form SniPTips"** (gel caps given by mouth or squirted into food) and **"EZ-CHEW Omega-3 Fatty Acid"** (low allergen chewable tablets).

* **IMPORTANT: Look for "NASC" seal on labels of veterinary Omega-3 supplements for guarantee of quality !**

* Additionally, Omega-3's are extremely valuable for joint, heart and kidney health. Highly recommended for people, too!

Warm Baths with Cool Rinses + Aloe & Oatmeal Shampoos + Other Shampoos & Rinses:

GOOD - If your dog is intensely itchy, a WARM BATH followed by a COOL WATER RINSE should provide temporary relief. Water alone soothes the skin, re-hydrates the outer skin layers, and washes away allergens and pollens that can be absorbed through the skin. While relief may last only a few hours, it can be easy to do (depending on the pet !) and inexpensive.

BETTER - **Aloe & Oatmeal shampoos** can be extremely helpful for the short-term (~24 hrs) relief of itchy pets. I definitely encourage frequent bathing of dogs in need of relief. Every time you bathe with Aloe & Oatmeal shampoos, you will be moisturizing the skin ~ not drying it out ! **We have a piña colada-scented Aloe & Oatmeal available at our events.**

BEST - Needless to say, it's essential to use the appropriate shampoo for a particular skin condition. For extremely itchy dogs, a shampoo with a topical anesthetic (such as **Pramox-1 + Oatmeal Shampoo ~ available at our events**) can be extremely valuable. For pets with bacterial and /or yeast infections of the skin, **our Keto-C Shampoo (also available at our events)** is very effective at treating and medicating skin infections when used properly and frequently.

IMPORTANT - **Leaving any shampoo on the skin for at least 12 to 15 minutes is crucial for best benefit.** And medicated shampoos do not lather as much, so avoid wasting more than you need. And *please* do not use people products for pets !

***** FOR MODERATE TO SEVERE ALLERGY CASES (The pet is very itchy & chewy ... quite a bit of hair loss ... very red and irritated skin ... often with a skin infection)**

Cortisone / Corticosteroids: In some situations, it is extremely beneficial to use corticosteroids (cortisone) to help relieve your pet's discomfort. While we get excellent results from cortisone, the side-effects make it undesirable for long-term use. In the short-run, we see an increase in thirst and urination, increase in appetite, increased panting and sometimes pets appear more anxious or agitated. The long-term use can have a profoundly negative effect on the body's adrenal glands.

When we prescribe corticosteroids, we encourage our clients to use them only as needed. We never intend for them to be used for long periods of time. Cats are unique in that they are typically more tolerant of cortisone than dogs (cats have fewer noticeable and undesirable side-effects than dogs), yet we still make every effort to limit their use in kitties as well.

Immunotherapy: Allergy immunotherapy based on intradermal skin testing or blood/serum testing can be a safe and effective way to control itching due to allergies. However, it requires skin or blood tests, it's more expensive than other forms of treatment (count on ~\$600-800 for testing), and it may take weeks to months before results may be seen once treatment is started, but it's possible to virtually eliminate the need for cortisone for dogs that are severely itching, biting, scratching and chewing.

The skin test is performed like a "patch test" in people. Hair is shaved from the side of the pet, then injections are made just beneath the skin with each injection representing something in the local environment that the pet may be allergic to. Typically, each dog is tested for 60-80 different items. Among the items are **local grasses, weeds, ragweed, pollens from trees and shrubs, flowers, molds and mildews, house dust, epidermals (cat skin, dog skin, etc), miscellaneous items (tobacco, kapok, cotton, wool, etc), feathers, house dust, fleas and insects.** Yikes ! As you can see, there are endless allergens that pets can be allergic to, and that doesn't include food allergies (btw, there is no reliable test for food allergies !).

Once it has been determined what a pet is allergic to, immunotherapy can begin. The idea is to "de-sensitize" the pet to whatever it is they're allergic to. Pets (like people) must receive injections regularly for the desensitization to work. Pets may need to continue injections for life in order to minimize the effects of allergies. Even though it may take weeks to months to see results, most pets respond well to immunotherapy, so it's worth trying if you can afford it.

Atopica (Cyclosporine): This prescription medication has proven to be effective at controlling allergies in many dogs and cats, but it is fairly expensive, and therefore more often recommended for smaller dogs. Side-effects may involve intestinal upset (vomiting and/or diarrhea), but it does *not* have the potentially harmful effects on the adrenal glands like steroids do.

Apoquel (Oclacitinib): This relatively new (2013) prescription tablet has proven to be very effective in controlling itching in dogs. Like Atopica, it does *not* have the potentially harmful effects on adrenal function like steroids do and, in general, has fewer side-effects than other allergy medications. However, it is VERY difficult to get from the manufacturer (sadly, we can't get it).

In conclusion, it can be frustrating to control your pet's allergies, and what works for one pet may not help another. But there are plenty of choices to give your itchy pet much-needed relief. Your pet doesn't have to suffer. *We can help your pet have a better quality of life.*

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