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Allergic Dermatitis An Owner's Guide to Pet Care

Your pet has been diagnosed as having allergic dermatitis. This brochure contains important information about this problem and how to care for your pet at home.

ALLERGIC DERMATITIS

Allergic dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin. It can be caused by many things, but regardless of the source, the end result is itching and the subsequent irritation caused by an overactive immune response.

SIGNS OF ALLERGIC DERMATITIS

Signs of allergic dermatitis include itching and hair loss along with frequent pawing or rubbing at the face and eyes. Often the pet will lick or scratch its ears, feet, armpits, thighs or groin. This constant trauma will often cause chronic infections.

CAUSES OF ITCHING

In many cases, the same pollens and house dust that cause asthma in people also cause allergic dermatitis in dogs and cats. It can be very difficult to distinguish between true allergies and the many local irritants that can cause itching. Some examples of each are listed below:

Allergic Cause	Result
Flea Saliva	Flea Bite allergy
Tick secretions	Tick allergy
Poison Ivy	Allergic contact dermatitis
Wandering Jew	
House dust	Atopy (allergic inhalant dermatitis)
Ragweed	
Dairy products, Beef	Food allergy
Fish, Wheat	
Staphylococci (staph)	Bacterial hypersensitivity
Non-Allergic Cause	Result
Flea infestation	Flea bites
Tick infestation	Tick bites
Incomplete shampoo Removal	Local irritant (contact dermatitis)
Ringworm	Fungal infection
Sarcoptes, Otodectes	Mange
Bacteria	Pyoderma (skin infection)

As you can see, many things cause itching in pets. And this is just a partial list! It should be noted that local irritants can result in itching without allergies, and many of the causes mimic each other in appearance. For example, fleas can be a source of both allergic and non-allergic itching. The diagnosis in these cases can be very difficult and time consuming. It takes the experience and knowledge of your veterinarian to be sure of the true cause.

DIAGNOSIS

Because there are many causes, and the signs may be so similar, a systematic approach to the diagnosis is critical. This may include some, or all of the following evaluations:

Family history	Skin scrapings
Physical exam	Fecal exam
Fungal culture	Complete blood count
Bacterial cultures	Skin biopsy
Heartworm test	Allergy testing (intradermal or blood)
Dietary eliminations	
Dietary history	

TREATMENT

To achieve success in treating allergic dermatitis, you must first follow the instructions of your veterinarian. Your pet's allergy may need to be managed by numerous methods including injections, oral medications, topical shampoos, dips, ointments, environmental treatments or special foods. Avoidance of the allergen is very important and often difficult, especially when your pet is allergic to more than one source. One type of avoidable allergy is food allergy. Many possible causes of food allergy have been identified including dairy products, beef, fish, mutton, pork, chicken, wheat, corn, soy, eggs, and many others. Recent studies have indicated one of the best ways to diagnose a food allergy is by feeding an elimination diet for several weeks. An elimination diet is a pet food which contains a limited number of protein sources and no artificial flavors or colors. If a homemade recipe is used for long periods of time it must be properly balanced. Do not ignore or substitute any ingredients without first consulting your veterinarian. Remember that cats need taurine in their food. Clam juice, by itself is not an adequate source of taurine.

HOW TO MEDICATE YOUR CAT

1. You may have to give your cat medication either the liquid or tablet form. If your cat doesn't like this idea, remember it's for your pet's own good. Start by wrapping your cat's body and legs tightly in a towel, leaving only its head sticking out from the towel.
2. If you cradle your cat in one arm, and place your thumb and forefinger in either side of its face, you can force the mouth open by applying gently pressure at the space between the teeth.
3. This will allow you to deposit a pill in your cat's mouth.
4. Next, massage or rub your cat's throat until he or she swallows.
5. If you have to give your cat a liquid medication, use the above procedure but insert the dropper between the cheek and teeth and, while tilting the chin upward, slowly dispense the medication.

HOW TO MEDICATE YOUR DOG

1. If your veterinarian prescribes oral medication for your dog, a few simple tricks may come in handy. If you have to give your dog tablets, the easiest way is to hide the pill inside a small amount of the canned Prescription Diet food you are feeding your pet.
2. If you are feeding the dry form, buy a few cans of the same Prescription Diet formula and use this for administering the tablets.
3. Offer this treat before the regular meal. Dogs usually accept this treat without questioning your motives.
4. If you must give your dog a liquid medication insert the dropper between the teeth and cheek and, while tilting the chin upward, slowly dispense the medication.

These techniques are generally accepted and used by veterinarians for the administration of medications to pets. However, it is recommended you consult with your veterinarian before applying them.