

Components of therapy involve the following:

- Flea control is imperative, because fleas worsen the problem, especially if the pet has a flea allergy.
- Omega-3 fatty acid supplements [DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) and EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid)] help reduce skin inflammation, are very safe, and are usually given in conjunction with other therapies.
- Medications to reduce inflammation and control itching in dogs and cats with allergies commonly include antihistamines, glucocorticoids, cyclosporine, or oclacitinib.
- Topical therapies. There are many advantages of topical therapies such as shampoos, rinses, sprays and wipes. They include removal of debris and allergens from the skin. Treating secondary bacterial or yeast infections with therapeutic shampoos, sprays and wipes can help provide immediate relief to the pet (some contain anti-itching medications) and may aid in reducing the need for oral or injectable medications that may have unwanted side effects. Some topical therapies also help repair the skin barrier function.
- Oral medications to treat for bacterial and yeast infections are indicated when topical therapies might not be able to address the problem quickly enough or completely.
- “Allergy shots” may be formulated based on the results of allergy testing. Once you and your veterinarian know what your pet is allergic to, a series of “allergy shots” are prepared for your pet based on that information. The “allergy shots” train your pet’s body not to react abnormally to the allergen (the substance to which your pet is allergic). It may take up to 9 – 12 months to see beneficial results.
- Some pets with atopy benefit from switching to a higher-quality food, even if they don’t have a food allergy.

Follow-up Care

Atopic dermatitis is a life-long disease and requires long-term management. You and your veterinarian can partner together to find the most effective treatments for your pet. Recheck appointments will be necessary to monitor response to therapy and minimize flare-ups.

1. Treatment recommended for your pet is: _____

2. Notify the Veterinarian if: _____

3. Recheck date: _____

Let your veterinarian know if you are having difficulty with the treatment recommended. There are many options to help your pet and they can tailor a plan to best fit your pet’s needs.



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ATOPY

Atopic dermatitis (ay-TOP-ick dur-ma-TIE-tiss) (also known as Atopy) is an allergic skin disease in dogs and cats. Like human allergies, it’s brought on by exposure to allergens (allergy-causing substances) in your pet’s environment. These can be grasses and plant pollens, house dust and house dust mites, mold spores, and even feathers. Allergens cause reactions by sticking to the skin and being absorbed through the skin, causing the animal’s immune system to react to that allergen. This extremely common allergic skin disease is second only to flea allergy dermatitis in frequency and is incurable. Atopy affects about 10 percent of dogs, and is a genetically inherited, recurrent, itchy skin disease that usually begins by 1 to 3 years of age. Cats also appear to have a genetic component and familial history. The majority of cats (> 75% of cases) will develop clinical signs between 6 – 24 months of age.

Clinical Signs

Signs occur either during a specific pollen season or year round, depending on what the pet is allergic to. In early canine atopy, itching is often seasonal and the skin looks normal. Dogs scratch at the ears and undersides of their body. The itching is often accompanied by face-rubbing, sneezing, a runny nose, watery eyes, and licking at the paws (which usually leaves brown stains on the feet).

If the disease progresses, your pet's skin can become extremely itchy, red, scaly and irritated. An itch-scratch-itch cycle develops with deep scratches in the skin, hair loss, scabs, crusts, and a secondary skin infection. If you can imagine a chronic case of severe poison ivy, you'll begin to understand why atopic animals experience hair loss from scratching, rubbing and licking. Over time, the skin becomes thick and darkly pigmented. Flaky skin often develops in conjunction with the skin infection.

In cats, the common and consistent sign is itching localized to the face and neck. Subsequent hair loss occurs, and many cats will go on to develop wounds, scratches and raised bumps on their bodies – mainly around the head, neck and undersides of the body.

In both dogs and cats, ear infections may accompany these signs. The ear flaps can be red and inflamed, and the canals are filled with a brown wax that eventually causes bacterial or yeast infections.

Diagnosis

Atopy, especially when complicated by a skin infection, can be difficult to distinguish from other skin diseases. The diagnosis can be suspected based on the history, location of skin lesions, and seasonal pattern of occurrence. Tests including skin scrapings, bacterial and fungal cultures, skin biopsy, and a trial hypoallergenic test diet should be considered to rule out others causes of itching before embarking on an involved course of treatment, or more intense diagnostics, for atopy. It

is important to treat and eliminate fleas. The majority of dogs and cats with atopy are allergic to fleas and may have an associated flea allergy dermatitis complicating the picture. Sometimes, in certain areas, monthly or oral flea treatments are not enough for these pets.

Allergy testing can support the diagnosis of atopy and can be done either by intradermal skin testing or blood testing. Both tests have some level of inaccuracy associated with them. However, the testing can help determine what the pet is allergic to, and aid in treatment to control the symptoms.



Treatment

The most effective long-term solution is to change the pet's living circumstances to avoid the allergen. The atopic pet is usually allergic to many different allergens, however, and often it is not possible to avoid exposure to them all. Or you may not know what triggers your dog's or cat's allergies.

Since avoidance of allergens is often not possible, treatment is designed to make the pet more comfortable. It is not possible to cure environmental allergy, but luckily, most pets with atopy respond well to treatment. One of the first, and most important, steps is to reduce the threshold for scratching by treating and eliminating all associated irritating skin problems, such as fleas, flaking skin, and infection.

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Allergies and the Atopic Patient

