Is Your Pet Itching for Allergy Relief?

What Every Pet Owner Should Know About Animal Allergies and Treatment
Animals Suffer From Allergies Too

Millions of domestic animals, such as dogs, cats, and horses, have some form of allergy. There are an estimated 2.1 to 10.5 million allergic dogs in the United States alone.¹ ²

Allergy symptoms are among the top reasons pet owners visit their veterinarians.³ You probably know human allergy symptoms like sneezing, runny nose, and watery eyes. What you may not know is that your pet can suffer the same distress but have very different symptoms.

Signs that may mean your pet is suffering from an allergy include:

- Scratching
- Face rubbing
- Hair loss
- Ear infection
- Biting and chewing at the skin
- Recurring skin infections
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

If your pet shows any of these signs of allergy, talk to your veterinarian.
Three Kinds of Animal Allergies

**Atopic Dermatitis** is a skin disease associated with allergies to environmental pollens, molds, house dust, and other common airborne substances (allergens). Skin irritation causes excessive scratching, licking, or rubbing, which may lead to infections. Atopy is genetic and occurs when a pet’s immune system does not react normally to allergens that are inhaled or absorbed through the skin. Symptoms can appear year round or seasonally, and they affect pets of all breeds and backgrounds.

**Flea Allergic Dermatitis** is a common form of animal allergy in which even a single fleabite can cause itching in an allergic animal. It is the most common type of allergy in dogs. Food Allergies can appear as skin irritations but may also show up as vomiting and diarrhea.

Three Kinds of Solutions

If your pet exhibits signs of allergies, talk to your veterinarian about testing and treatment options. Your veterinarian can check for allergies with a simple blood or skin test. If it’s an allergy, there are ways to alleviate your pet’s symptoms.

**Avoidance** of all environmental allergens is almost impossible. However, avoidance can decrease exposure and may reduce your pet’s symptoms. Avoidance can be effective for flea and food allergies but is not practical for allergies to things in your pet’s environment.

**Symptomatic treatment** addresses your pet’s symptoms using corticosteroids, antihistamines, cyclosporine, or fatty acids, but does nothing to stop the underlying cause of the allergy.

**Allergen-Specific Immunotherapy** is a long-term treatment that builds immunity to allergens using a serum specifically formulated for your pet’s allergies, starting with a very small dose and increasing gradually. Allergen-specific immunotherapy is safe for most animals. This option is used for treating atopic dermatitis but is not recommended for flea and food allergies.

Your veterinarian will help you decide which option is most appropriate for your pet.
Allergen-Specific Immunotherapy: A Long-Term Plan

Allergen-specific immunotherapy is the only treatment known to actually change the course of the disease instead of just masking the symptoms.7

Allergen-specific immunotherapy:
• Builds up your pet’s immunity to allergens through a series of treatments using increasingly larger doses of a prescription specifically formulated for your pet’s allergies7
• Is effective for allergies to pollens, molds, house dust, and other common airborne substances6
• Has been used in humans for more than 100 years8

More than 65% of animals have good-to-excellent improvement with allergen-specific immunotherapy.6

The response to immunotherapy is best when an individualized treatment regimen is developed based on your pet’s allergy test results.6 Allergen-specific immunotherapy has also been shown to be safe and well tolerated.5,7,9
A Natural Solution

Unlike medications that just treat symptoms, allergen-specific immunotherapy works to naturally regulate the immune response using small amounts of the allergen(s) found in nature. Because it affects the immune system, allergen-specific immunotherapy is the only treatment that treats the cause of allergies.\textsuperscript{7}

Immunotherapy can lead to a long-term solution for your pet’s allergies and has not been shown to have long-term side effects.\textsuperscript{6,7}

- Works to normalize the immune response
- Natural solution
- No long-term side effects
2 Treatment Options for Allergen-Specific Immunotherapy

Allergy Shots
Administered with a needle under the skin (subcutaneous)

Allergy Drops
Liquid placed under your pet’s tongue (sublingual)

Both shots and drops can be given at home. You may need to administer shots more frequently at the start of treatment, but then may be able to give the shots weekly or monthly as symptoms get under control. Drops are typically given daily for the entire treatment period.
What to Expect

Successful allergen-specific immunotherapy requires time, commitment, and patience. First, it may take several weeks for your veterinarian to determine exactly what is causing your pet’s allergies. Your veterinarian will ask about the history of your pet’s symptoms and then test for the allergens that may be causing those symptoms. If allergen-specific immunotherapy is determined to be the right treatment, your veterinarian will formulate a customized treatment regimen specific to your pet.

Second, you and your veterinarian should discuss whether shots or drops are better for you and your pet. You can give your pet either shots or drops in your own home. Your veterinarian will teach you how to administer the shots or drops, which may be given monthly, weekly, or daily.

Safety Considerations

Allergen-specific immunotherapy is safe for most animals, and some animals experience no side effects. The most common side effect is itch, which may last from a few hours to a few days. Some pets may experience redness, swelling, or tenderness at the administration site after a shot or redness, excessive drooling, sneezing, or panting after drops. Serious adverse events are rare; however, contact your veterinarian if your pet experiences any of the following: vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, seizures, collapse, hives, difficulty breathing, or facial swelling.
Relief Is on the Way

All animals respond to allergen-specific immunotherapy differently. Some pets show improvement in the first 3 months of treatment, with most responding within 6 months. Complete remission is possible, but for most pets, allergen-specific immunotherapy is a lifelong process, and they may sometimes need additional medications to fully control their symptoms.
Controlling Allergens in Your Pet’s World

Avoiding all environmental allergens is almost impossible. However, you can decrease your pet’s exposure, which may reduce your pet’s allergy symptoms. Here are a few suggestions:

- Dust and vacuum often, but not when your pet is present
- Consider installing air conditioning, air filtration systems, and/or a vacuum with air filtration to avoid introducing allergens back into your pet’s environment
- Use dehumidifiers to help control mold and mites
- Bathe your pet frequently with a veterinarian-recommended shampoo
- Use other topical products as prescribed by your veterinarian
- Limit your pet’s outdoor time during the peak allergy season
- Avoid going outside at dawn and dusk, which can be times of high outdoor pollen
- Rinse off your pet’s paws right after being outdoors
- Seek veterinary care immediately to treat any suspected skin infections aggressively
Frequently Asked Questions

What exactly is allergen-specific immunotherapy?

Allergen-specific immunotherapy is a long-term treatment that builds your pet’s immunity to allergens through repeated administration, either with shots or drops, that delivers increasingly larger doses of a serum specifically formulated for your pet’s allergies. It is effective for treating allergies to pollen, mold, house dust, and other common airborne substances, but it is not recommended for flea or food allergies.

Will allergen-specific immunotherapy cure my pet’s allergies?

Allergen-specific immunotherapy may result in complete remission for some pets, and their owners may consider them “cured.” Unlike medications that treat your pet’s current symptoms, allergen-specific immunotherapy works to regulate your pet’s immune response to provide long-term symptom improvement.

When can I stop treatment?

When your pet’s symptoms are under control, it may be possible to extend the time between doses, but treatment should continue as long as symptoms persist. Allergen-specific immunotherapy has not been shown to have lasting side effects, so it can be used for the life of your pet.
Are shots or drops better?
Neither treatment is better than the other, but shots or drops may be more appropriate depending on you, your pet, and your pet’s allergies. For example, if you do not feel comfortable handling needles, you may want to use drops. Or if your pet does not allow you to handle its mouth, shots may be preferred. You should discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each option with your veterinarian.

How were the allergens in my pet’s prescription chosen?
Your pet’s allergy test results, history, and exposure to allergens help reveal the allergens that affect your pet. The treatment vials contain a purified combination of these problem allergens.

What results should I expect?
You may see a decrease in symptoms as soon as the first month. The average time before symptom improvement is 3 to 4 months. Some animals may take up to a year to respond. Improvement usually continues with longer treatment. You and your veterinarian can set goals for your pet’s unique situation. Allergen-specific immunotherapy is safe and has few side effects. However, you should monitor your pet closely for about 30 minutes after giving shots or drops to watch for any side effects.
REFERENCES


