

# 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 10.8 million allergic dogs in the US alone.<sup>1,2</sup>

Allergy symptoms are among the top reasons pet owners visit their veterinarians.<sup>3</sup> You probably know the symptoms of human allergies, such as sneezing, runny nose, and watery eyes. What you may not know is that your pet can suffer the same distress, but with very different symptoms. Signs that can mean your pet is suffering from an allergy are:

- 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.**

1. Market research statistics: US pet ownership—2007. American Veterinary Medical Association Web site. <http://www.avma.org/reference/marketstats/ownership.asp>. Accessed March 3, 2010.

2. Hillier A, Griffin CE. The ACVD task force on canine atopic dermatitis (I): incidence and prevalence. In: Olivry T, ed. *Vet Immunol Immunopathol*. 2001;(81):148.

3. "Top Reasons For Veterinary Visits", VPI Pet Insurance, <http://www.petinsurance.com/healthzone/pet-articles/pet-health/Top-10-Reasons-Pets-Visit-Vets.aspx>. Accessed October 10, 2010.

4. Flea and Flea Dermatitis. In: *The Merck Veterinary Manual*. 9th ed. Whitehouse Station, NJ: Merck & Co., Inc.; 2008. <http://www.merckvetmanual.com/mvm/index.jsp?cfile=htm/bc/71600.htm>. Accessed December 7, 2010.

## Three Kinds of Animal Allergies

**Atopic Dermatitis** is associated with environmental pollens, molds, house dust, and other common airborne substances. The first signs of atopy are usually skin irritations, which, coupled with excessive scratching, often lead to more complicated 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.

**Flea Allergic Dermatitis** is a common form of animal allergy in which one flea bite can cause itching in an allergic animal. It is the most common type of allergy for dogs.<sup>4</sup>

**Food Allergies** can be seen 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 allergy, there are ways to alleviate your pet's problem.

**Avoidance** of all environmental allergens is virtually impossible. However, avoidance can decrease exposure and may lessen your animal's symptoms. This option is most effective for flea and food allergies but often impractical for allergies to things in the pet's environment.

**Symptomatic treatment** addresses animal's symptoms using corticosteroids, antihistamines, cyclosporine, or fatty acids but does nothing to stop the progression of the allergy.

**Allergen Specific Immunotherapy** is a safe, long-term treatment that builds your pet's immunity to allergens through injections with increasingly larger doses of a serum specifically formulated to your pet's sensitivities. This option is effective for treating atopy, but not recommended for flea and food allergies.

**Your veterinarian will help you decide which treatment option is most appropriate for your pet.**





## Allergen Specific Immunotherapy: A Long-Term Plan

Allergen specific immunotherapy is the only treatment known to actually alter the course of the disease, rather than mask the symptoms.<sup>5</sup> It builds up your pet's immunity to allergens through a series of injections with increasingly larger doses of a prescription specifically formulated to your pet's sensitivities. This treatment is effective for allergies associated with pollens, molds, house dust, and other common airborne substances.

77% of animals are reported to respond to allergen-specific immunotherapy.<sup>6</sup> Many factors influence effectiveness. Responses are best when an individualized treatment regimen is developed based on the pet's response.<sup>6</sup> In the long term, immunotherapy has been shown to have no long-term side effects.<sup>5,6</sup>

5. Griffin CE, Hillier A. The ACVD task force on canine atopic dermatitis (XXIV): allergen-specific immunotherapy. In: Olivry T, ed. *Vet Immunol Immunopathol*. 2001;(81):368-369.

6. Reedy IM, Miller, Jr, WH, Willemse T. 1997. *Allergic Diseases of Dogs and Cat*. WB Saunder Company Ltd. Philadelphia, PA. pp 136-138.

## A Natural Solution

Unlike medications that "cover up" or suppress your pet's abnormal immune system, allergen specific immunotherapy works to regulate the immune response *naturally* using small amounts of the naturally-occurring allergen(s). Because immunotherapy is believed to change the pet's actual allergic response, it is the only treatment that can prevent a worsening of your pet's allergies.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, immunotherapy can lead to a long-term solution for an animal's allergies, meaning longer time between injections. In addition, immunotherapy has been shown to have no long-term side effects.<sup>5</sup>

- No suppression of immune system
- Works to normalize the immune response
- Natural solution
- No long-term side effects





## Knowing What to Expect

Successful allergen specific immunotherapy requires time, commitment, and patience. First, it may take several weeks for your veterinarian to determine exactly to what your pet is allergic. Then, if allergen specific immunotherapy is the next step, a specific formulation is made just for your pet. A close partnership between you and your veterinarian will make the process easier.

With allergen specific immunotherapy, you can give your pet treatments in your own home. Your veterinarian will guide you through the process of administering injections and caring for your pet in other ways.

## Relief is on the Way

All animals respond to allergen specific immunotherapy differently. Sometimes, improvements occur within the first month of treatment, but more typically, your pet will show improvements by the third or fourth month of treatment. The treatment period should last a minimum of 6 to 9 months. Though complete remission is possible, for most pets, allergen specific immunotherapy is a lifelong therapy.<sup>7</sup>

7. Griffin CE, Hillier A. The ACVD task force on canine atopic dermatitis (XXIV): allergen-specific immunotherapy. In: Olivry T, ed. *Vet Immunol Immunopathol*. 2001;(81):377.

## Controlling Allergens in Your Pet's World

Avoiding all environmental allergens is virtually impossible. However, you can decrease exposure which may lessen your animal's symptoms. Here are a few suggestions.

- Dust and vacuum often, but not when the pet is present.
- Consider installing air conditioning, air filtration systems and/or a vacuum with air filtration to avoid reintroducing allergens back into the pet's environment.
- Use dehumidifiers which help control mold and mites.
- Bathe your pet frequently with a veterinarian-recommended shampoo.
- Use other topical products as prescribed by your veterinarian.
- Limit the pet's outdoor time during peak allergy seasons.
- Avoid going outside at dawn and dusk which can be times of high outdoor pollen.
- Rinse off your pets' paws right after they've been outdoors.
- Seek veterinary care to treat any suspected skin infections immediately and 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 injections with increasingly larger doses of a serum specifically formulated to your pet's specific sensitivities. This option is effective for treating allergies from pollen, molds, house dust, and other common airborne substances, but not recommended for food allergies.

## Does immunotherapy cure my pet's allergies?

Allergies are lifelong problems that can be controlled but not cured. Unlike medications that "cover up" or suppress your pet's abnormal immune system, immunotherapy works to regulate the immune response. It has been shown to have no lasting side effects.

## Will my pet always need injections?

When your pet's symptoms are under control, it may be possible to extend the time between doses, but allergy injections will be necessary as long as symptoms persist.

## How were the allergens chosen that are in my pet's prescription?

Your pet's allergy test, history, and exposure to allergens revealed the specific allergens affecting your pet. The treatment vials contain a purified combination of these problem allergens.

## What results should I realistically expect?

Some decrease of symptoms may be seen as early as 3 weeks. Usually though, the average length of time before an initial response is 3 to 4 months. Some pets may take up to a year to respond. Continued improvement is frequently seen with longer use. Your veterinarian will set goals with you for your specific situation.