



Allergies Handout

Skin allergies are some of the most common problems we see with our canine and feline patients. There are 3 basic categories of allergens.

- 1) Insects: fleas, mosquitoes, ants, etc.
- 2) Food: Dogs are mostly allergic to beef, dairy, and/or chicken. In cats, the common food allergens are beef, fish, and chicken.

NOTE: ANIMALS ARE NOT ALLERGIC TO BRAND NAMES; THEY ARE ALLERGIC TO INGREDIENTS, which becomes important in individual case management.

- 3) Environmental factors: pollens from plants and trees, grasses, dust mites, molds

It is common for a pet to have multiple allergies from more than 1 category.

In dogs, the common symptoms seen are:

- Itching, scratching
- Skin infections
- Hair loss or barbering fur
- Chronic and/or recurrent ear infections
- Licking feet
- Soft bowel movements or diarrhea
- Excess gas
- Wheezing and coughing

In cats, the most common symptoms seen are:

- Itching, scratching
- Hair loss or barbering fur
- Vomiting, especially intermittent & chronic vomiting
- Wheezing and coughing

Diagnosing Allergies

Certain patterns of clinical signs (symptoms) can be straightforward and obvious - such as itching around the backside with flea allergies. However, many cases are more difficult to pinpoint the cause because of the overlap in with food and environmental allergies. Allergy testing can tell us what pollens the pet is allergic to within their environment. While there are

tests available for food allergies, they can be quite unreliable. Therefore, a hypoallergenic (or novel protein) food trial is often the best way to diagnose food allergies.

Insect Allergies:

Out of the major categories of allergens, we can directly reduce or eliminate exposure to two of them- insects and food. It is vitally important that all dogs and cats with suspected allergies stay on year round flea control. Cats are especially adept at eating the evidence (fleas) before they are found, and just ONE flea bite is enough to send highly allergic pets into a frenzy of itching and further cascading problems. The typical flea allergy pattern is hair loss and/or barbering at the area around the top of the tail and the back of the back legs.

Food Allergies:

The only way to truly test for food allergies is to feed a hypoallergenic diet for a period of 6 to 8 weeks and see if that makes a difference in the pet's symptoms. During the hypoallergenic food trial, the pet can have **NOTHING ELSE** other than the hypoallergenic food and water. If it is not possible to completely eliminate other items from the pet's diet, then the trial will not work. Often dogs and cats with GI signs show marked improvement within 6-8 weeks of eliminating the offending ingredients from their diet. Pets with ear infections and itchiness generally take longer to respond. Hypoallergenic diets are more expensive than regular foods, but if symptoms are greatly reduced, they will save the pets' owners money over the lifespan of the pet. Novel protein or hydrolyzed diets include: Purina's HA Salmon or Vegetarian, and/or Royal Canin's HP and Ultamino.

Environmental Allergies:

Environmental allergies are the most difficult to manage. If your pet is allergic to pine pollen for example, it is completely unavoidable in the springtime. We can try to manage the symptoms with medications, or we can start hyposensitivity injections, i.e. allergy shots. These shots are based on your pet's individual allergens as determined from allergy testing. While allergy testing and injections are initially expensive, money is again saved in the long term by reduced secondary ear and skin infections, less medications & less veterinary visits

Allergy management is just that- management. There is no single way to manage them; it is an individualized plan of trial and error to figure out what works for a particular animal. And unfortunately, there is no cure for allergies; the treatment is lifelong and may have to be adjusted over time. Our goal is to get a pet's symptoms under control as quickly and effectively as possible, reduce flare ups, and keep your pet comfortable.

A few allergy medication options for dogs include Cytopoint and Apoquel.

- Cytopoint (monoclonal allergy injection that is given just like a vaccine) can provide itch relief for up to 8 weeks or longer. We do not need to follow up with any blood work when using this allergy management.
- Apoquel (an oral medication given twice daily for 2 weeks and then once daily for maintenance). Follow up blood work is needed after a dog has been on it for a month (cost of chemistry panel is ~\$72) and then once yearly thereafter.
- An option of trying an over-the-counter anti-histamine trial such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) or cetirizine (Zyrtec). At times it does provide some relief (only one or the other, unless directed).

