



Allergies (Atopy)

Atopy (airborne allergy) is only one type of allergy a dog may have. Other common allergies are flea allergies and food allergies.

The age of onset for atopy is generally between 6 months and 3 years. Signs are usually seasonal but may be seen all year. Approximately 10% of dogs are thought to be genetically predisposed to become sensitized to allergens in the environment. Any dog of any breed (or mixed breeds) can be atopic. Breeds predisposed to developing allergies include Chinese Shar-Peis, Wirehaired Fox Terriers, Golden Retrievers, Dalmatians, Boxers, Boston Terriers, Labrador Retrievers, Lhasa Apsos, Scottish Terriers, Shitzhus, and West Highland White Terriers.

Just like people, our pets can suffer from allergies and sensitivities to particles in the air. Many times, pollen, certain grasses and trees or even dust mites can trigger this reaction in pets. Unlike people though, our pets rarely sneeze and show signs similar to "hay fever". Instead, our pets are itchy and they will do anything to relieve that sensation. Some pets scratch constantly, others lick and chew at certain spots, like their feet and still others might rub against carpets and furniture. Scratching can lead to secondary signs of wounds, scabbing, infection, hair loss, and scaling. Other signs of atopy include licking or chewing the paws and rubbing the face and eyes.

A good management plan requires the use of several different treatments, the understanding and reasonable expectations for response from the pet owner, and frequent progress evaluations so that the plan can be adjusted as needed. Sampling the skin is usually a step towards the correct treatment and progress monitoring.

Often Veterinarians will prescribe a combination of therapies for atopic patients:

- A diet high in Omega 3 & 6 oils to help reinforce the skin barrier
- Medicated shampoos and ointments to relieve inflamed itchy skin
- Immune-modulating drugs (Cyclosporin [Atopica], Prednisolone [steroids]) to suppress an overactive immune system
- Apoquel tablets (JAK inhibitor) to stop the itch signal
- Cytopoint injections (monoclonal antibody) to stop the itch signal
- Immunotherapy (allergy shots) to help stop specific allergies

Immune Modulating Drugs such as Atopica and Prednisolone can help to suppress the allergic response. Prednisolone can have side effects with long term use, so this is generally used as a short-term treatment. Atopica is an excellent way to effectively suppress atopy signs by blocking inflammatory chemical release. It provides long term relief for many patients and is designed for long-term use.

Apoquel and Cytopoint are newer drugs designed specifically to stop the itch signal and are safe for long term use with little to no side effects.

Allergy testing can be used to identify the offending allergens and to formulate a specific immunotherapy treatment program. Immunotherapy attempts to increase a dog's tolerance to environmental allergens. Vaccine preparation involves selection of individual allergens for each individual dog. The dog must be cooperative enough to receive allergy injections. Allergy shots improve the condition but do not cure the disease. Many animals may still require anti-itch medications during seasonal flare-ups. Improvement may not be visible for 6 months and a year of treatment may be required before you can tell if the immunotherapy is working.

Regardless of your choice, treatment takes a long- term commitment. You must be willing to follow instructions accurately, be patient, and be able to communicate effectively with your veterinarian. We cannot cure allergies, so your pet will need long term medications to help prevent the distress of Atopy.