



Allergic Dermatitis



Allergic Dermatitis – what is it?

Allergies are abnormal immune reactions to molecules (termed allergens) associated with normal things the body encounters. This can result in various unpleasant reactions, including skin disease. Allergies can be to parasites (especially fleas), environmental allergens, food or a combination of these.

‘Atopy’ or ‘atopic dermatitis’ is an allergic dermatitis thought to be caused by exposure to a variety of environmental allergens. It is extremely common in dogs and increasingly common in cats.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

What are the signs of allergic skin disease/atopy?

1. Generalised itchy skin
2. Foot chewing
3. Facial rubbing/scratching
4. Ear problems
5. Inflamed skin (commonly along the chest and groin/in the armpits)

Animals with atopic dermatitis are thought to have a defective skin barrier, which allows allergens to penetrate, triggering the allergic response and causing inflammation and pruritis (itch).



WHAT ARE THE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS?

Allergies cannot be cured and usually some form of lifelong management is required. This will involve:

- Controlling exposure to allergens
- Therapy directed at controlling the inflammation and itching
- Control of secondary 'flare factors' e.g. fleas or infections with yeast or bacteria



Controlling exposure to allergens

Completely avoiding allergens other than food is almost impossible but reducing the level of exposure will reduce the severity of the allergic reaction. The most common allergens are house dust mites, human/animal dander and pollens.

Try to tick off the following points:

- Keep your dog in a separate room whilst dusting and vacuuming and for 2 hours after
- Bedding: Use a hypoallergenic bed or one that is washed weekly, in a room without carpet
- Keep your dog out of the bedrooms
- Try to avoid contact with freshly cut grass and rinse your dog's feet after walks.
- Wash your dog weekly – your Vet can advise which shampoo to use
- You may be asked to consider a diet trial to test for food allergies

See our separate advice sheet on House Dust mites for more information



Therapy

Most dogs will require some form of medication, either intermittently or continuously. These may include:

- Oclacitinib (Apoquel) - This daily tablet blocks activation of the nerves responsible for pruritis (itch).
- Lokivetmab (Cytopoint) - This monoclonal antibody is given via injection every 4 weeks and causes a reduction in inflammation and pruritis.
- Steroids (Prednisolone/medrone) - whilst these are often effective at resolving pruritis they can have side effects when used long term. Often sprays or creams may be used instead of tablets to avoid these unwanted effects.

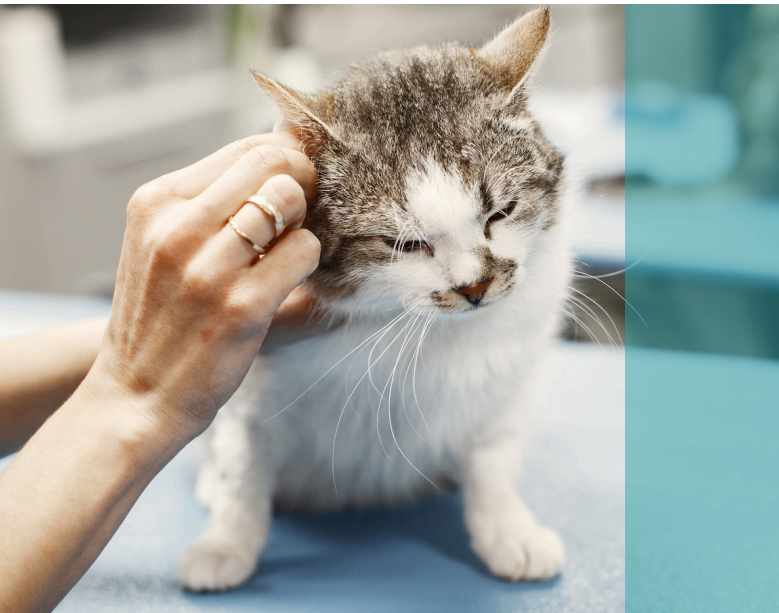
- Immunotherapy – Blood tests are used to identify allergens and a ‘vaccine’ is made, which is injected at regular intervals. This works best in young dogs with a short history of disease. A complete response is seen in approximately 30% of dogs, with up to 70% showing a partial response.
- Anti-histamines – a small number of dogs benefit from use of these off-license medications.
- Essential Fatty Acid supplements – these should be given to all patients to improve the skin barrier. Your Vet can advise which ones to choose.



Control of secondary ‘flare’ factors

It is important to treat any conditions, which add to the level of itch and inflammation. This includes:

- Regular flea treatment – your Vet can advise which product to use
- Treating yeast and bacterial infections – often medicated shampoos/foams/creams are used, occasionally oral antibiotics or anti-fungals will be needed.
- Remember that the ears are part of the skin – regular ear cleaning may be recommended as part of the maintenance routine, and you should monitor closely for infections.



Atopic dermatitis needs long term treatment and management, usually with a combination of therapies.

Even well managed allergies can develop flares requiring additional treatment. Changes can happen rapidly, so vigilant monitoring is important.