



Does Your Dog or Cat Have Allergies

Most people are quite familiar with the classic symptoms resulting from allergies in humans, such as sneezing, wheezing, coughing, itchy and watery eyes, along with nasal and sinus congestion. This is because about 1 out of 5 people suffer from allergies, which will rank allergies as one of the most common medical problems in humans. Similar to humans, dogs and cats suffer from allergies, with about 1 out of 10 pets being affected. However, the symptoms are not quite the same as in humans.

Signs of allergies in dogs and cats

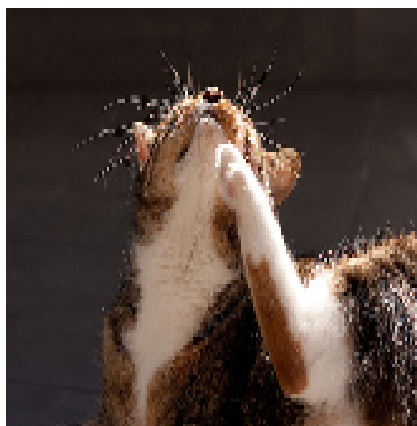
The most common sign of allergies in dogs and cats is itching, manifested by scratching, rubbing, licking and chewing. The scratching and itching that are due to allergies are always more intense than normal and may lead to varying degrees of hair loss and rashes. The rashes often represent infection. In rare cases, vomiting and/or diarrhea may be present especially if the dog or cat suffers from food allergy. In some cases, dogs or cats suffering from allergies show hayfever-like symptoms such as sneezing, watery eyes and runny nose.

In a good number of cats, skin lesions without associated itching are the only clinical signs of allergy.

What causes allergies?

Allergies are an inheritable disease that is the result of the body's defense mechanism (the immune system) abnormally reacting to certain common substances in the environment.

Allergic symptoms may be seasonal or year around. Normally the immune system is responsible for the body's ability to fight off infections. When the body detects a potentially dangerous foreign substance, like bacteria or virus, the immune system is marshalled and it makes preparation to go to war against the foreign substance. One of the arsenals the immune system immediately begins to manufacture is a special type of protein called antibodies.



These antibodies are like self-guided target-specific destroyers. They travel throughout the blood until they find the foreign substance, attach themselves to it and render the substance harmless. In the case of allergies, the immune system of a dog or cat that is allergic thinks that the dog or cat is being invaded by a foreign substance when the dog or cat is exposed to a certain substance in the environment. These substances are called allergens and are usually pollens of weeds, trees and grasses, house dust, insects, human and animal dander, molds, foods and chemicals.

The allergic dog or cat then makes a special type of antibodies against these substances. Whenever the pet comes in contact with these allergens the antibodies attach themselves to them. When this happens a series of chemical reactions occur in the body that result in the release of mediators that cause inflammation and itching. The allergic itching and scratching and general discomfort observed in the allergic dog or cat is the result of these mediators.

Allergies Continued...

Are your dog or cat's skin problems due to allergies?



While a good number (as high as 40%) of skin irritations in dogs or cats are allergy-related, it must be emphasized that not all skin problems in pets are due to allergies. Other skin irritations may masquerade as allergic-type symptoms. This is why it is important that your pet's skin problem be accurately diagnosed so that proper treatments can be administered. Your veterinarian should be consulted when your dog or cat show signs of skin problems.

How are allergies diagnosed?

Finding out what is causing the allergies in a dog or cat always takes careful detective work. A small amount of blood is taken from your pet and a complete allergy blood test is done.

The allergy blood test for dogs and cats is a sensitive laboratory blood test which will identify the different allergic substances that are responsible for your pet's allergies. The test searches for and identifies each of those special allergy-producing antibodies that may be present in your pet's blood. By accurately finding and measuring the amount of the allergen-specific antibodies present in the blood sample, the Liquid Gold allergy blood test is able to identify the different substances causing your pet's allergies— an essential first step on the way to getting your pet well.

Treatment for allergies

While avoidance of the substances identified as causing the allergies in your pet is the best form of treatment, it is not always practical. A strict flea control program and removing foods positively identified during testing from the diet can help control both flea and food allergies. Allergies due to pollens, molds, dander, etc. are almost impossible to avoid. Drugs such as corticosteroids and antihistamines can be valuable in temporarily relieving symptoms but the prolonged usage of corticosteroids can cause serious systemic side effects.

The most practical and clinically preferred form of treatment when your dog or cat is diagnosed with allergies, is hyposensitization. It is very safe and cost-effective. The initial cost may seem to be high, but the program will, in the long run, cost you less than any other form of treatment.

Hyposensitization

Your dog or cat can be rendered immune to the various substances detected by the allergy blood test. This is achieved by vaccinating your pet against the identified substances, much like children are vaccinated for protection against childhood diseases.

The major difference is that allergy hyposensitization takes a longer time— up to 6-months, or longer in certain cases. **Approximately 60% of pets hyposensitized will be controlled without the need for any steroids.** An additional 20% of the pets are helped by hyposensitization but may need further steroid drugs (at much lower dosage than if not hyposensitized) during the worst of the allergy season. Successful hyposensitization is highly dependent on an accurate diagnosis and a faithful adherence to the prescribed schedule of treatment.



If you suspect that your dog or cat has allergies, consult your veterinarian to discuss testing and treatment options. Your best friend can live without the discomfort of allergies and the serious complications of long-term use of corticosteroids.