

# healthful pets

## Allergies in Pets



### What are allergies in pets?

Allergies in pets are common and are an abnormally intense / overreaction of the immune system to something that is normally harmless to the body, known as an allergen. Your pet may be born with sensitivities or for other pets, allergies are acquired over several years of continual exposure to the allergen.

**So, what happens?** Your pet, each day will also come across hundreds of harmless substances or particles, which are all part of the normal environment and which are not harmful. Under normal circumstances your pet's immune system will recognise these and not see them as unwelcome invaders. However, in pets with allergies, the pet's immune system will believe these common day-to-day substances as invaders that it must get rid of and therefore will mount an immune response. As the pet's body tries to fight the "invaders" reactions in the form of allergy symptoms will appear.

Allergies may also present themselves differently in dogs and cats <sup>[1]</sup>.

### So what are potential allergens?

Your pet could have allergic responses from both food (such as wheat) or the environment such as grasses or pollen leading to seasonal allergies. Below are a list of typical allergens, but to be honest your pet could react to anything in their environment or food.

#### Allergens can come from

- **Fabrics** – in collars, bedding, sofas. **Carpets**, for example have any of these been recently introduced?
- **Chemicals** such as aerosols, household and car cleaning products
- **Laundry, upholstery and other soft furnishing cleaners** – chemicals including perfumes for example added to many washing products
- **Rubber and plastic materials**
- **House dust and dust mites** – which are in the environment all year around. Fleas may cause Flea Allergy Dermatitis, most commonly in cats which react to the flea saliva.
- **Tree, shrub and grass pollen** (in the environment for certain periods of time each year often late spring and summer), **farm crops** such as cereals; oil seed rape, and **mould spores** especially in autumn (harvesting season), **ragweed**

- **Foods and food additives, preservatives** – this could be an individual protein source such as chicken, beef, grains such as wheat, corn, oats; soy, dairy, or an additive or colouring used in the manufacturing process. There is a likely link between the incidence of allergic reactions and over exposure to a protein source. If your dog or cat is not responding to steroid treatment, for example, and the diet has not been changed, then this could be a further clue than foods are the cause of the allergic response.
- **Many treats, chews and palatable medicating products** contain additives, cereals, beef extract and other proteins which could act as allergens.

As it happens, true food allergies are relatively uncommon in dogs with up to 15% of the canine population being affected by food allergy. <sup>[2]</sup> More often, your pet may show food intolerance and typically develop diarrhoea but not an immune reaction.

If your pet only has a reaction such as itching during the spring and summer months then they are most likely to have an allergy to something at that time, such as tree and or grass pollen. If, however your pet continues to have allergic reactions outside of these seasons, then this likely points to an all-the-year source.

Allergy testing can be carried out to see what substances your pet might be reacting to, although these tests highlight reactions at a certain point in time and this can vary, as your pet's immune system varies at different times of the year.

### What are typical symptoms your pet will have if they have allergies?

Dogs and cats must generally be exposed to the allergen for some time before the allergy develops. Allergies are also more common in certain breeds of dogs than others, such as Retrievers, Setters, Terriers as well as Pugs, Bulldogs, Lhasa Apsos, Shih Tzu, Cocker Spaniel as others. <sup>[3]</sup>

Allergies typically start to develop from puppyhood to three years of age. To make matters worse, as the animal ages, your pet may develop allergies to other things and the response to any one allergen becomes more severe.

Allergic conditions are considered often to be made worse by stress, so the general environment, overall health and well-being of the pet as well as nutritional and immune status may play a part in both the initiation and progress of the condition.

The types of symptoms your pet will exhibit will depend on the specific allergy.

### Symptoms / how does the body respond to an allergen?

- An **itching sensation** over any part of the body leading to scratching and/or excessive licking causing redness and often damaged skin and hair loss. Your pet may rub their faces on the carpet. The skin may become dry and crusty or oily. It is also common to get secondary bacterial infections of the skin due to these self-inflicted lesions.
- **“Hot spot” lesions** which appear suddenly, as very moist, often smelly and intensely itchy sores with hair loss and weeping of serum. The lesion often develops over the rump or sometimes on the face or neck, is usually tender though the pet often wants to chew the area. They mostly are seen in dogs, singly or with a matching lesion on the other side of the body, and can quickly increase size and become infected.
- **Flea Allergy Dermatitis**, as the name suggests, causes skin lesions, usually in cats. Many small crusty lesions develop, often over the rump initially, but they may extend to much of the body and cause constant long-term irritation unless contact with fleas can be prevented. Veterinary attention should be sought to settle the condition in the first instance.
- **Sore, inflamed and often smelly ears.** Recurrent ear infections as the wax-producing glands in the ear overproduce as a response to the allergy. Bacteria and yeast often “over-grow” in the excessive wax and debris.

- **Paws** which are swollen / chewing on the feet
- Red / watery **eyes**, which can be swollen.
- Sneezing / coughing/ wheezing as a result of **inflamed sinuses or airways**. Excess mucus and nasal discharge. **Feline asthma** develops in a small percentage of cats; the condition may be life-threatening with severe breathing difficulty, gasping, gurgling sounds, increased respiratory effort with shoulders hunched, neck extended and mouth open. Less severe signs are seen after exertion; there may be persistent cough with frothy mucus production; noisy breathing out, increased swallowing activity and weakness and lethargy.
- **Gastro-intestinal** issues such as wind, diarrhoea, increased bowel movements, sickness, anal gland problems.

Because the symptoms of inflammation are produced from the inside out, creams, sprays and shampoo, whilst providing much needed relief during a flare-up, can only provide temporary relief. Likewise, avoiding exposure, as far as possible, to the agent causing the reaction will help reduce symptoms and may slow worsening of the reaction over time. The long-term solution, however, must focus on balancing the immune system.

## So, what could help?

One of the most important steps to fighting allergies is catching your pet's allergic response early on. You may identify symptoms before it develops to a systemic response. However, if your animal is sore, swollen, red, or itchy then it is best that you visit your vet to get a diagnosis.

1. **Nutrition** – feed your pet a wholesome, non-allergenic (and certainly avoiding any known allergens), biologically appropriate food that allows the immune system to heal. So, ensure gluten free (wheat is a known food allergen) and ideally low grain (common grains are wheat, barley, corn/maize). In dogs, beef, chicken and to a lesser extent lamb are common allergens and in cat's beef, fish and chicken and to a lesser extent lamb are common allergens <sup>[4]</sup>. Offer foods which are as natural as possible. Include variety to ensure that your pet is less likely to react to the same monotonous foods and to give balance and a healthy immune response.

If pets are fed the same food source over a prolonged period of time, the immune system can come under attack from the same allergens for so long that it begins to react negatively to the food source. Dogs and cats were not designed to solely eat one protein source such as chicken or beef as may be provided by commercial foods. Many mainstream commercial foods also typically contain high amounts of carbohydrates, often from grains, and may contain chemical additives, any of which can act as allergens.

Avoid making too many dietary changes at once, as every pet will react differently to changes or the additions of any supplements.

### Try conducting an elimination diet

Once an allergic reaction has developed to a substance those reactive antigens (an antigen being how the body sees the allergen-causing molecule) can circulate in the bloodstream for weeks causing inflammation and irritation. Therefore, any elimination diet should ideally last at least five weeks for dogs and six weeks for cats, and longer if possible. A clinical study found that after 8 weeks there was complete remission in 90% of dogs and cats with adverse food reactions <sup>[5]</sup>. During this period the pet must not eat any foods or treats which are suspected may be the cause of the reaction.

After the pet has been given adequate time to clear the allergic substances from the body, new foods can be slowly re-introduced. Check for any symptoms. Many of the foods that were previously considered a problem can be often incorporated into the diet once your pet has had ample time to detoxify.

## 2. **Supplementation** – supplementation may be considered;

- ➡ **Probiotics**, especially acidophilus. There is much evidence to show that acidophilus are good bacteria that help balance the body's immune system. When there is balance in the gastrointestinal tract your immune system functions more optimally.
- ➡ **Dysbiosis** – Often dysbiosis or leaky gut can be a reason why allergies can get progressively worse from one year to the next. It is the job of the gastrointestinal tract to allow nutrients in and keep allergens out. With leaky gut allergens are able to enter the bloodstream through gaps that have developed in the lining of the gut, allowing undigested food, bacteria and toxins to “leak” into the bloodstream, leading to the immune system to mount a response and ultimately causing allergies and other health issues.
- ➡ **Evening Primrose Oil** – Evening primrose oil which contains omega-6 fatty acids and a high content of Gamma Linolenic Acid (GLA) has active anti-inflammatory and anti-itch compounds. Evening Primrose oil can be taken orally or it can be applied to your cat or dog's skin to help with dry or itchy skin issues.
- ➡ **Omega-3 Fatty Acids** – these are essential fatty acids that cannot be made within the body. New research has shown that these important omega-3 fatty acids may be beneficial in the management of allergies in dogs and cats. Omega-3 fatty acids help to reduce the amount and effects of histamine and other chemicals that are released as a response to allergies. The EPA of these essential fatty acids is anti-inflammatory and can help relieve allergic responses in the body. Consider Dr Mercola Krill Oil or a high quality, pure, omega-3 fish oil such as from Nordic Naturals who use wild anchovies and sardines from the South Pacific Ocean or Grizzly Salmon Oil from Wild Atlantic Salmon. Again, these can be taken internally or applied topically to your pet. Most pets will need to take these omega-3 fatty acids daily for a few weeks to months to notice any significant improvement.
- ➡ **Dorwest Garlic & Fenugreek and Mixed Vegetable tablets** with natural active ingredients, are licensed veterinary herbal supplements for skin disorders. Containing natural anti-inflammatory and antihistamine compounds they are perfect for relieving the irritation of itchy skin.
- ➡ **Dorwest Easy Green Powder** contains three “super green foods” of parsley, spinach and watercress that helps to cool the skin making it beneficial for dogs and cats with skin conditions
- ➡ **Coconut oil** contains high levels of lauric acid with it's natural anti-fungal properties, help fight the production of yeast, a common inflammatory component. Coconut oil can be used internally by adding to your pet's food or applying externally to specific areas.
- ➡ **Reishi Plus** mushroom supplement – Reishi's anti-oxidant properties make it especially valuable for supporting the liver and its high polysaccharide content and triterpenoid compounds inhibit histamine release and modulate the immune system.
- ➡ Consider supporting the liver to help the body detoxify any toxins. As the skin is one of the body's key detoxification organs, the skin will be used to detoxify toxic material from poor-quality food, environmental pollutants and chemical products which are applied to the skin and vaccinations, especially if the kidneys aren't able to handle the job. Products such as Dr Mercola's Liver and Kidney Support or Diet'Dogs Superfoods Beta to help support the liver to remove toxins.

### **Other suggestions of things that may help?**

- **Bathe** – to help keep allergens off your dog or cat shampoo frequently. Make sure shampoos are chemical, paraben-free, pH balanced and contain no nasties.
- **Foot Soaks** – consider keeping your pets paws clean to reduce the amount / likely hood of allergens that your pet can bring in from outside, especially if your dog licks his / her feet.
- **Eye Rinses** - If eyes are sore, regular eye rinses may help. Consider colloidal silver for the face and around the eyes or Bogar's Perfect Eye Cleaner with soothing eyebright and witch hazel which can be used with their eye pads.

- **Soothing, natural skin balms** – try Dorwest – Comfrey & Calendula balm with comfrey, geranium, burdock and calendula for their soothing, anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory benefits, or Colloidal Silver Cream which contains colloidal silver as well as coconut oil to make this a great anti-viral, anti-fungal and anti-bacterial cream.
- **Ear cleaners and oils**- skin products as above may be used on the outer parts of the ear; colloidal silver can also be used for cleaning. For wax accumulation in dogs, apply a few drops of very gently warmed olive oil mixed with Tea Tree lotion or oil and massage the ear canal. In cats, if the ears are dirty just use a couple of drops on cotton wool and wipe the inside of the ear with care. Avoid excess cleaning as this stimulates production of more wax and may encourage secondary bacterial or yeast infection. Chemical disinfectants may be toxic so seek veterinary advice.
- **Grooming** – brush your dogs coat on a regular basis to a) keep the dog clean b) the brushing action stimulates the skin's oil producing glands, helping to keep the coat waterproof.
- **Boots and Coats** - To help reduce self-injury and relieve the stimulation of more itching, purchase some boots for the foot which does the scratching (or apply a sock dressing). A lightweight coat or even well-fitting T-shirt often helps; a soft collar can be applied to help prevent chewing and scratching around the head and ears.
- **Minimise your pet's exposure to chemicals**- think what chemicals the pet's bedding is washed in, or the towels that are used to dry your dog down after a walk. What household cleaning products/chemicals does your pet come into contact with i.e. dogs that lie on the floor or carpet, cats on beds and sofas etc. What is used to clean the dogs' or cats' food bowls? Clean **bedding, carpets, soft furnishing** materials regularly using low allergen washing products, to reduce allergen contamination and exposure to aggravating chemicals. Choose dust-free cat litter and change it frequently to avoid build-up of urine vapour products.
- **Walks and other outdoor activities**-choose walk and play areas away from grass especially when it is long, heavily pollinated or seeding. As far as possible; keep to pathways; avoid flower borders, heavily pollinated trees and shrubs, mouldy leaf accumulations and farm crops. After walks, wipe off your pet's underline, legs and feet with a dampened cloth or towel to remove allergens which may have been picked up; this reduces contact time and helps to prevent or reduce reactions; also fitting a coat or t-shirt will reduce contact with pollens or other airborne allergens when outdoors. Avoid drying bedding, towels etc. outside when pollen counts are moderate or above. Remember pollens and mould spores will be disturbed and aerated by harvesting activity in the late summer and autumn.
- **Control fleas and other parasites** which may aggravate any skin or potentially respiratory reactions; reduce dust mites by frequent vacuum cleaning. Flea and mite control is especially important in Flea Allergy Dermatitis and Feline Asthma (See our Blog on Flea Prevention).
- **Reduce stress and anxiety- use natural calming products**-lavender and camomile and some natural calming pheromones may be used in diffusers (be careful of other chemical components) and the oils/seeds may be used in bedding or as aromatherapy to help reduce stress; consider other environmental or management changes to improve well-being and reduce anxiety, such as where/ when you feed your pet, especially in a multi-pet household.

## Sources

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*The content of this fact sheet is for general information and guidance only and is not intended to amount to advice on which you should rely. For individual situations, where there are concerns about conditions persisting or worsening, or suitability of products, pet owners or carers should seek veterinary advice or contact us at [hello@healthfulpets.co.uk](mailto:hello@healthfulpets.co.uk) to seek further advice from the manufacturers.*

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