ALLERGY PROBLEMS IN DOGS

GRAND AVENUE
VETERINARY CLINIC

Facts About Allergies in Dogs

- All itching dogs should be examined for other causes of itching before diagnosis and/or management of allergies can be pursued.

- Atopy is the most common cause of itching in dogs. The blood test used to identify the allergens costs about $270.

- Atopy can be managed medically by using allergy shots or assorted pharmaceuticals, including shampoos, antibiotics, topical agents, and various medications. Medications vary in cost, efficacy, and side effects.

- Food allergies can also cause itching. The best means of managing food allergies is to use a hypoallergenic diet that has a novel protein source. These diets are only available through a veterinarian.

Allergies in dogs can be one of the most frustrating problems to deal with when it comes to the health of your pet. Not only is the constant scratching annoying to you, but the degree of discomfort the dog suffers from is often the driving factor in trying to find help. Any itching dog should first have a complete exam to rule out other causes of itching. These causes can include ectoparasites such as fleas, mange, and lice. Once these are rules out, diagnosis and management of allergies can be pursued.

Atopy

Atopy is a condition in which the dog is allergic to environmental allergens. Examples of the many allergens that cause atopy include common pollens and dust. Signs of atopy can include itching, scabs, wheals, ear infections, and ocular discharge. Atopic dogs often have seasonal severity of their allergies.
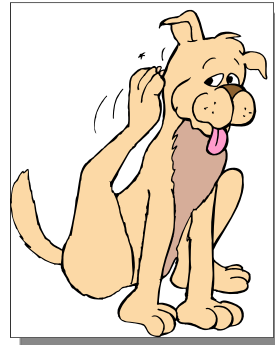
Diagnosis

Diagnosis of atopy can be done with a skin or blood test. Kin testing involves a referral to a dermatologist, and cost is around $1000. Blood testing can be performed at GAVC for around $270., but tends to be less accurate than skin testing.

Treatment Options

Most owner opt for some sort of medication to manage itching., as this becomes a means of providing almost instantaneous relief.

Over-the-counter antihistamines are cheap but rarely effective. Apoquel® is almost always effective but pricey at

around $2.50 per pill. Steroids can be used as well, and they tend to be very inexpensive, but dogs on steroids will have short term (increased thirst, hunger, and urination) and long term (liver damage) side effects that make them unsuitable for long-term management.

Cyclosporine is a chemotherapy drug that is as effective against allergies when used at lower doses. However, it is significantly expensive up front, with a decreased cost over time if the dog can be maintained on weekly or twice weekly dosing.

Hypoallergenic shots. Can be created for dogs who have been skin or blood tested These shots are administered by the owner. Allergy shots are successful in reducing discomfort in 70% of dogs that receive them, but the dog must be on the shots for a minimum of 12 months before determining their success. Cost of the shots depends on how many allergens your dog is allergic to, but on average runs around $130 for an 8 to 10-month supply.

Some more mildly affected dogs can be treated symptomatically. This includes weekly bathing with a medicated shampoo. Occasionally antibiotics are necessary to control secondary infections if seen on the examination.

COULD MY DOG BE ALLERGIC TO ITS FOOD?

Food allergies are the second form of skin allergies in dogs. Dogs with food allergies have the same degree of itchiness year-round, because they are always eating (of course!).

Dogs with food allergies are allergic to proteins in their

food. In order to treat food allergies a special diet must be used that is only available through your veterinarian. These prescription diets have exotic protein sources (such as duck, venison, or catfish). An 8-week food elimination trial is used to rule out a food

allergy.

Only 50% of food allergy dogs show a reasonable response to steroid or other drug therapy. The constant high dose of the allergen is the likely reason for the failure of drugs to control the problem.