



# ALLERGY PROBLEMS IN DOGS

## 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 \$175.
- Atopy can be managed medically by using allergy shots or assorted pharmaceuticals, including shampoos, antibiotics, topical agents, and antihistamines. Steroids can also be helpful but have short-term and long-term detrimental side effects. Cyclosporine is a newer, more-expensive option, but with fewer side effects than steroids.
- 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 ruled 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 include itching, scabs, wheals, ear infections, and ocular discharge. Atopic dogs often have seasonal severity of their allergies; they may itch more depending on the time of year when certain allergens are in the air.

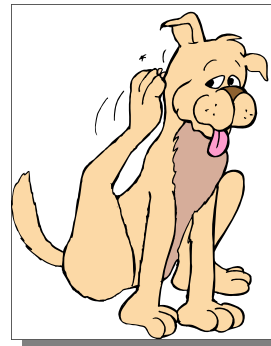
### Diagnosis

Actual diagnosis of atopy can be done with a blood test.

This test can be performed here at GAVC for around \$150.

### Treatment Options

The safest treatment for atopy is hypoallergenic shots. 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 de-



pends on how many allergens your dog is allergic to, but on average runs around \$100 for a 10-month supply.

Due to the cost of diagnosis and hyposensitization shots, many owners instead opt to treat symptomatically. This

involves the use of various pharmaceuticals to control clinical signs. One hallmark is weekly bathing with a medicated shampoo, available from your veterinarian. This is a cheap and often helpful means of washing allergens from your dog's skin, as well as administering topical relief. Occasionally antibiotics are necessary to control secondary infections if seen on the examination. Some topical salves or sprays may be utilized for specific lesions. Oral antihistamines, such as Benadryl®, may be helpful in reducing itchiness.

Steroids are the most powerful anti-inflammatory drug used to ease itching. However, they will cause increased thirst and hunger, as well as an increase in the frequency of urination. Long-term use can cause liver damage, so they are typically only used for short-term management, and then only as a last resort.

Cyclosporine is a steroid-like drug that is as effective but has significantly fewer side effects. However, it does cost significantly more.

## 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). A 12-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.