

# Allergies and Your Pet

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## Introduction

Allergic problems are some of the most common conditions seen in veterinary medicine. Just like you and I, dogs and cats can be allergic to lots of things. These causes can include pollens from grasses, trees, weeds, spores from fungi, products in and around the home, and also foods. The itching, inflammation, infection, and pain caused by allergies in pets can be very frustrating and upsetting for pet owners. The most important thing to remember is that this is a lifelong process that can very often be effectively treated and managed but cannot be completely cured.

## Symptoms

As illustrated in the images below, symptoms of allergies in pets are primarily associated with the skin and ears. Areas that are focal points for allergic symptoms in pets are the ears, skin of the feet, trunk, face, or hind end. **ITCH, REDNESS, BUMPS AND PUSTULES, SORES, THICKENED AND DISCOLORED SKIN, AND GENERAL DISCOMFORT** are typically seen.

## Fleas

In order to properly diagnose, treat, and control allergic symptoms in pets, the first potential problem that must be addressed is effective flea control. Even occasional flea presence can invalidate any efforts to get a handle on a pet's allergies. In addition, flea allergies can be a primary issue that can cause significant chronic itch even after only a few bites. **It is essential that complete flea control be confirmed before proceeding with additional diagnostics and treatments.**

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# Breaking the cycle of the itch

Regardless of the treatments your veterinarian may recommend for any and all problems associated with allergic symptoms, it is essential that we break the cycle of the itch. This means calming the inflammatory process of the allergy and thereby stopping the vicious cycle that exists between the allergy, the infections, and subsequent additional inflammation. For example; lets say your dog or cat has allergies and has developed an ear infection or skin infection secondary to that allergic inflammation. In most cases, it is not enough to solely treat the infection. The inflammation that allowed the infection to take place, and the additional inflammation that occurs because of the infection, must also be directly addressed. Methods for that control are discussed in the following sections.

## Short term management

In some mild cases, and often early-on in the treatment process, a trial of antihistamines may be attempted to determine if any benefit can be had by their use. Due to the differences in the way allergies affect pets and people, antihistamines are often much less effective in pets than in people. However, if they are effective at reducing the symptoms they can be a safe, easy, and inexpensive option for dealing with mild and occasional symptoms of allergies. In cases where antihistamines are ineffective, or symptoms are considered too severe, occasional use of anti-inflammatories such as corticosteroids are often used to very effectively reduce the severity of the symptoms. When used in limited scope, in combination with treatment for secondary infection, and under the direction of a veterinarian, these medications can be a cost effective and safe tool at our disposal.

**The frequent or long term use of corticosteroids as a treatment for chronic allergic symptoms is NOT recommended, and can be dangerous to your pet's health.**

## Long term management

There are numerous long term management strategies for the control of chronic allergic symptoms. These often include multi-modal approaches, using topical, oral, or injectable medications for the reduction of severity and frequency of symptoms. Special therapeutic prescription diets, or diet changes to address sensitivities to certain food ingredients may also be attempted. In some cases, allergy testing is required to determine the causes of the symptoms and best select a set of treatment options. After allergy testing is performed, immunotherapy injections, similar to the

“Allergy shots” that you may have heard of people receiving, become an option. Specially formulated for your pet only, these custom injectable products work by gradually desensitizing your pet to those allergens that cause them problems by training the immune system to ignore their presence. By working closely with your veterinarian, and taking a stepwise and logical approach to chronic allergy management, your pet can achieve reduction of severity and frequency of symptoms and ultimately **comfort and relief** from its allergies.

## ALLERGIES SYMPTOMS

### FACE

SYMPTOMS: RED, HAIR LOSS AROUND EARS OR MUZZLE, SWOLLEN  
BEHAVIOR: LOTS OF SCRATCHING, RUBBING FACE WITH PAWS, SNEEZING

### EARS

SYMPTOMS: RED ODOR, WAXY DISCHARGE, YEAST INFECTIONS  
BEHAVIOR: SCRATCHING, RUBBING, SHAKING HEAD.

### HAIRCOAT

SYMPTOMS: REDNESS, BARE SPOTS, BAD ODOR, DISCOLORED FROM LICKING OR SORES  
BEHAVIOR: LICKING BODY, SCRATCHING, RUBBING ON FURNITURE

### SKIN

SYMPTOMS: REDNESS, BAD ODOR, HAIRLOSS, SCALY SKIN, DRY, IRRITATED  
BEHAVIOR: SCRATCHING, LICKING, TREMBLING, RUBBING ON OBJECTS

### PAWS

SYMPTOMS: DISCOLORATION, INFLAMED, HOT SPOTS, DRY SKIN, RED OR BROWN BETWEEN TOES  
BEHAVIOR: CHEWING AND LICKING



## Symptoms of Dermatitis

Look for the following symptoms

Red, scaly or raised patches of skin

Excessive biting, licking, or scratching of the skin, feet or ears

Thick skin

Bumps or pus-filled areas on the skin

Hair loss



Brownish saliva



Increased pigmentation on the skin



Constantly shaking the head