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ALLERGIC DERMATITIS

Allergic dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin. Many things can cause it, but regardless of the source, the end result is itching and the subsequent irritation caused by an overactive immune response.

Signs of Allergic Dermatitis

Signs of allergic dermatitis include itching and hair loss along with frequent pawing or rubbing at the face and eyes. Often the pet will lick or scratch its ears, feet, armpits, thighs or groin. This constant trauma will often cause chronic infections.

Causes of Itching

In many cases, the same pollens and house dust that cause asthma in people also cause allergic dermatitis in dogs and cats. It can be very difficult to distinguish between true allergies and the many local irritants that can cause itching. Some examples of each are listed below:

Allergic Cause

Flea saliva
Tick secretions
Poison Ivy, Wandering Jew
House dust, Ragweed
Dairy products, Beef, Fish, wheat
Staphylococci (Staph)

Result

Flea bite allergy
Tick allergy
Allergic contact dermatitis
Atopy (allergic inhalant dermatitis)
Food allergy
Bacterial hypersensitivity

Non-Allergic Cause

Flea infestation
Tick infestation
Incomplete shampoo removal
Ringworm
Sarcoptes, Otodectes
Bacteria

Result

Flea bites
Tick bites
Local irritant (contact dermatitis)
Fungal infection
Mange
Pyoderma (skin infection)

As you can see, many things cause itching in pets. And this is just a partial list! It should be noted that local irritants can result in itching without allergies, and many of the causes mimic each other in appearance. For example, fleas can be source of both allergic and non-allergic itching. The diagnosis in these cases can be very difficult and time-consuming.

Diagnosis

Because there are many causes, and the signs may be so similar, a systematic approach to the diagnosis is critical. This may include some or all of the following evaluations: family history, physical exam, fungal culture, bacterial cultures, heartworm test, dietary elimination, dietary history, skin scrapings, fecal exam, complete blood count, skin biopsy, allergy testing (intradermal or blood).

Treatment

To achieve success in treating allergic dermatitis, you must first follow the instructions of your veterinarian. Your pet's allergy may need to be managed by numerous methods including injections, oral medications, topical shampoos, dips, ointments, environmental treatments or special foods.

Avoidance of the allergen is very important and often difficult, especially when your pet is allergic to more than one source. One type of avoidable allergy is food allergy. Many possible causes of food allergy have been identified including dairy products, beef, fish, mutton, pork, chicken, wheat, corn, soy, eggs and many others. Recent studies have indicated one of the best ways to diagnose a food allergy is by feeding an elimination diet for several weeks. An elimination diet is a pet food which contains a limited number of protein sources and no artificial flavors or colors. If a homemade recipe is used for long periods of time it must be properly balanced. Do not ignore or substitute any ingredients without first consulting your veterinarian. Remember that cats need taurine in their food. Clam juice, by itself, is not an adequate source of taurine.

Home Management

At home, your pet needs special attention. Provide plenty of clean, fresh water (distilled water if your veterinarian has so instructed). If your veterinarian has performed a biopsy, prescribed a special medicine or recommended a special food, be certain to closely follow instructions for care and activity restrictions. For your safety and for the safety of your pet, use environmental sprays and foggers only as directed.

SPECIAL HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR PET:
