

Pet Allergy Season Is Here!

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Humans aren't the only ones who suffer from allergies. Dogs and cats can be allergic to anything from certain foods to everyday things like pollen, grasses, insects (especially fleas), certain chemical-based products and even carpet fibers. However, it can sometimes be difficult for dog and cat owners to recognize the signs of pet allergies. Unlike their owners who sneeze and get watery eyes during allergy season, pets tend to react differently. One of your first clues that your dog or cat may have allergies is excessive itching.

Other common allergy signs include:

- Chewing at the feet. Feet may appear red and inflamed.
- Constant licking or chewing, especially their side or groin areas.
- Skin may appear dry, flaky/crusty, or reddened.
- Waxy or black discharge from ears. Also, inflamed ears and constant ear infections.
- Puffy, tearing and reddened eyes that they may rub often.

Pet's allergies can be year round or seasonal, just like humans. Watch for symptoms and also pay attention to the local news for pollen/mold counts.

Food Allergies in pets

Food allergies are one of the least likely causes of allergies in dogs and cats. True food allergies only account for about 15% of allergy problems in pets, however, certain food ingredients can cause an allergic reaction in your pet. You need to be careful that you are not confusing a food allergy with food intolerance. Usually a food allergy will cause itching, skin rashes, and hair loss. Food intolerances tend to cause vomiting, diarrhea, and excessive gas. Certain breeds, such as Siamese cats, West Highland Terriers, Cocker Spaniels, and Irish Setters appear more likely to develop food allergies and intolerances. Dog and cat food designed for dogs with food allergies or food intolerances are available at many veterinary clinics.

Flea Allergies

A flea allergy has always been the most common allergy seen with dogs and cats. When a flea bites your pet, it deposits a small amount of saliva onto the skin. Your pet can develop flea allergy dermatitis, FAD, which is a reaction to this saliva. The reaction causes severe itching, which is very uncomfortable to your pet. If a dog or cat is allergic to fleas, one bite can cause itching for up to three weeks. Just imagine if one flea bite can do that, how miserable your pet would be with 50 to 100 flea bites!

Fortunately, today there have been new advances in flea control to prevent FAD. There are topical treatments such as Frontline as well as pills that kill fleas and control flea eggs, flea larvae, and all stages of ticks. Check with your vet to find the most effective treatment for your pet. Many pets have allergic reactions to over the counter flea products, and they can also make pets very sick. With the introduction of new flea control products, no dog or cat should be allowed to suffer from Flea Allergy Dermatitis.

Other common allergens

In western Kentucky and southern Illinois, mold is common and may be your pet's allergy problem. In our area this can be a year long allergy versus a seasonal one. If your home was without power for an extended period during the recent ice storm, mold and other allergy issues may be worse than before.

Believe it or not, your dog could be allergic to your cat! Cat allergen is very lightweight, and very sticky. It sticks to walls, furniture, and carpet. It can also stay alive in the environment for at least 10 years. Your pet can also be allergic to you! Yes, people put out allergens also. No one understands why one pet develops allergies another does not. Genetics are thought to play a part, and people and pets are often allergic to the same things.

Helping your allergic pet

The key to treating your pet's allergies is to identify the source. This can be challenging but Dr. Flanary and her staff can work with you to solve the mystery. There are some things that you can do to help ease your pet's discomfort.

- Bathe your dog/cat once every two weeks with specialized shampoo. Brush your pet gently on a regular basis.
- Frequently dust and vacuum your home, but be sure to keep your pet out of the room until you are finished.
- Keep your pet indoors while you are mowing the lawn, or during periods when there is a lot of pollen in the air.
- Reduce mold and other allergens in your home by changing furnace and air filters frequently. If possible, run the air conditioner when it is hot and use a dehumidifier to prevent the occurrence of allergy-irritating molds in your home. Use exhaust fans when showering or cooking. Clean blinds and carpeting.
- Use hypoallergenic soap to wash your pet's bedding and unscented laundry detergents.
- Have your pet examined to determine the right allergy medication and to check for bacterial infections in the skin. Also, ask if allergy testing and immunotherapy is right for your pet.

Allergy Relief and Immunotherapy

If your dog or cat is a chronic allergy pet and is constantly having problems with allergies, licking, chewing, etc., there are several options for relief including treatment with medication and immunotherapy. Immunotherapy determines what your pet is allergic to; a blood sample is simply taken from your pet and sent to a laboratory. Specific allergens are then introduced to your pet to lessen their sensitivity to them. Immunotherapy is becoming a more common way of treating pet allergies, especially for the chronic allergy patient.

Pyoderma



Pets that have allergies will often have a pyoderma, a common bacterial skin infection. Several organisms may be involved but is usually caused by a Staphylococcus intermedius organism (Staph. infection). Some Staphylococci normally reside on the skin, but as long as the skin is healthy, these bacteria remain dormant. Once the skin is irritated, they can invade the area and rapidly multiply. Staph. infections usually arise from scratching often caused by fleas, allergies, and irritating chemicals, such as over the counter flea and tick products. These infections cause lesions that can begin as a red area on the skin with a pimple-like pustule. They also look like a circular red area with a crusty edge and hair loss. This can be confused with ringworm, so it is best to have your vet examine any skin condition to receive proper treatment.

The treatment for this condition is to administer a suitable antibiotic for 3 weeks or longer and the use of antibacterial shampoos help to bring the infection under control. Staph. infections can also be the cause of scratching in cases where pets are allergic to the bacteria. In these cases, pyoderma are often reoccurring and require additional treatment.

If you suspect your pet has allergies or a skin condition associated with them, contact your vet immediately. *