

WEST COAST

VETERINARY CLINIC

INFORMATION SHEET

ALLERGIC DERMATITIS

Allergies in our veterinary patients usually cause itchy dermatitis. The offending allergens can be pollens, molds, household allergens, insects, or foods. The key to successfully controlling the allergic dermatitis is to identify and control the underlying cause. This may require allergy skin testing, or dietary food trials. The additional use of symptomatic therapy (antihistamines, shampoos/conditioners, essential fatty acids) will help reduce the itchiness and are used in most of our allergic patients.

Allergy (pollen, food) can cause recurrent bacterial and yeast skin infections and chronic itchy skin disease. The infections can be very irritating and itchy making the clinical signs of allergy worse. The better we are at identifying and controlling the allergies, the fewer problems we will have with secondary infections.

KEY TO SUCCESS:

Successful therapy for the itchy patient uses treatments to eliminate all infections. At the same time, antihistamines, essential fatty acids, topical products, and steroids can be used to decrease the itchy symptoms. However, unless, the allergic disease (food allergy or environmental allergies) is identified and treated, the patient will continue to have problems.

TREATING THE INFECTION:

We will eliminate the infectious diseases and attempt to control the allergies. If signs of the infection return (rash with sudden increased itchiness) please call your veterinarian to arrange treatment.

The **bacterial skin infection** will be a continual problem until the allergy is identified and controlled. If prescribed, the antibiotics should be used until the infection is completely cleared (at least 21 days). The antibiotics should be restarted under veterinary supervision if the skin infection (rash) returns.

Yeast dermatitis is another common skin infection seen in allergic dogs. The yeast, *Malassezia*, causes extreme itchiness and lichenification (elephant skin) on the neck, underarms, and abdomen. Treatment for the yeast infection often includes antimicrobial shampoos, conditioners, or rinses and in severe infections oral antifungal medication may be needed.

Recurrent otitis (ear infections) are also associated with allergy. If present, we can eliminate the current infection but will need to continue a maintenance therapy protocol to prevent future infections.

CONTROL THE ALLERGY:

If **food allergy** is a concern we may need to perform a dietary trial. To diagnose food allergy we would start a dietary trial for 10 weeks feeding only the recommended diet (no treats, table food, vitamin, chewable medication) for 10 weeks. Watch carefully to note any changes. After 10 weeks, we would perform a dietary challenge with the old diet to confirm or rule-out diagnosis.

If **environmental allergies** (atopy) have been identified through allergy testing, we would consider starting hyposensitization vaccine therapy to try to decrease the immune system's allergic reactions.

Scabies is a parasitic infection that can look exactly like pollen allergies or food allergy. If suspected, your pet will be treated with either topical dips or oral medication that will kill the mites in the skin. This disease is curable with appropriate treatment.

CONTROLLING THE ITCH:

Controlling the allergies may require some "fine tuning" of the treatments to find the combination that works best for your pet.

Antihistamines can often help decrease the itchiness. Although not perfect, they do help reduce the itchiness with very few side effects. We may need to try several antihistamines before finding one that works well. If helpful, they can be continued indefinitely.

Essential fatty acid supplementation may be helpful to reduce the inflammation and itchiness. They have very few side effects and work with the antihistamines and steroids. If helpful, they can be continued indefinitely. If desired, give daily for 30-60 days to evaluate the response.

If necessary, use only oral steroid and try to minimize the dose. The steroids can be used to treat the severe reactions (put out the fire).

Topical therapy will help speed the resolution of the skin disease but will need to be modified as the disease resolves. A bath should be given every 3-7 days allowing the shampoo to contact the skin for 10 minutes then rinse.