



## Could Your Pet Have Allergies?

**+** Incessant itching, licking, biting and scratching are all commonplace for pets suffering from skin allergies. Like humans, pets endure a wide-range of dermatological allergic reactions that often leave their skin scabby, dry and inflamed and their quality-of-life lessened. These issues are so wide-spread, they consistently rank as the country's most common reason our pets visit their vets. For furry New Yorkers, and just like their human counterparts, the issue of pet allergies is as big as the city in which we live.



Though a number of things can cause a pet to scratch, such as flea bites and food allergies, more often than not, Atopic Dermatitis (atopy) is to blame. Atopy is a disease caused by an allergic reaction to an environmental allergen (or multiple allergens) such as pollens, dust mites and mold spores. Veterinarians believe non-food or atopic allergic reactions are an inherited predisposition for some animals. The atopy condition is more prevalent in dogs than cats. However, feline atopy

still falls within the top 10 claims submitted to VPI. This disease is generally seen in animals between the ages of two and four.

Allergens cause the most harm when they are inhaled, ingested or as they come into contact with a pet's skin. When the pet's body attempts to rid itself of the offending substance, a variety of skin, digestive and respiratory symptoms can occur and become very serious.

### Great News for Treating Pet Allergies

There are a number of effective treatment options when it comes to controlling a pet's uncomfortable allergic reactions. Your pet's veterinarian will likely begin by conducting simple allergy tests, which often include blood work and skin tests with the injection of small amounts of suspected allergens under the skin to spot reactions. Other common treatment options include a series of shots for desensitization or prescribing oral medications, such as steroids and antihistamines for itching and swelling. In addition, shampoos, rinses and other topical treatments can provide

fast relief, but are yet to be determined as an effective long-term treatment. Food allergies can be addressed through the prescription of a hypoallergenic diet and by eliminating the damage causing ingredient(s) through a process of elimination. For most allergic pets, a combination of therapies will be needed, as they are often allergic to more than one allergen.

If you suspect your pet may be suffering from skin allergies, your veterinarian will work to closely to diagnose the issue and determine the best treatment for your itching dog or cat.

### SYMPTOMS AND CAUSES

#### Most Common Allergic Symptoms

- Excessive scratching along with red, raw, inflamed, moist or scabbed skin
- Rashes or swollen areas of skin
- Itchy, runny eyes
- Irritated ears and ear infections
- Sneezing, vomiting or diarrhea
- Paw chewing, stained fur or swollen paws
- Obsessively licking or biting skin
- Pimples, bumps or welts
- Patchy loss of hair
- Reoccurring ear infections

#### Most Common Pet Allergens

- Tree, grass and weed pollens
- Mold spores
- Dust, dust mites and dander
- Cigarette smoke
- Certain prescription drugs, antibiotics or vaccines
- Flea bites
- Perfumes
- Cleaning products
- Rubber, plastic and fabrics
- Food, food additives and milk products

#### Breeds Most Commonly Affected

Certain dog breeds tend to be predisposed to allergies. They include Golden and Labrador retrievers, Shar-Peis, Beagles, Bulldogs, Boxers, Terriers (West Highland, Jack Russell, Fox, Boston and White), German Shepherds, Cocker Spaniels, Pugs, British Bulldogs and Miniature Schnauzers. All purebreds are at some risk for allergies.

## Flea and Tick Medication

When it comes to itchy pets, most pet owners tend to think first about fleas and ticks. They are, after all, as prevalent in New York City and surroundings as in most other cities. As recent news stories and product recalls continue to uncover, pet owners can face issues when attempting to select the best treatment for their pets. From phony imported pesticide treatments disguised as mainstream products to general confusion over doses for different breeds and weights, we'd like to share our top tips for making sure your cat or dog is protected, while receiving the safest and most effective flea and tick treatment possible.

- Never apply a product intended for dogs on a cat (and vice-versa). Doing so can cause vomiting, seizures and death
- Doses are calculated on a pet's weight, so please be sure to give the appropriate measurement to the correct pet
- Pay attention to over-the-counter product labels. Check medications for authenticity. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), pet owners should confirm that the packaging is printed only in English. Packaging should include the EPA registration number, the word "WARNING"

or "CAUTION" and will often have a child hazard statement such as "Keep Out of Reach of Children"

- Cat owners especially should avoid over-the-counter flea medications including flea bombs, dips and shampoos that contain the pesticides pyrethrin and permethrin. These ingredients are extremely dangerous to cats and can potentially cause vomiting, seizures, skin reactions and even loss of life

Above all, our best advice is to allow your veterinarian to recommend and provide the most appropriate flea and tick control products for your pet.



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