



Allergies

Your pet can be allergic to anything. They can have an allergic reaction from contact such as shampoo, from ingestion such as food or medicine, from something they inhaled such as pollen or dust mites or from injections such as vaccination, bee stings, or flea bites.

“Allergen” is the term given to the substance causing an allergic reaction. Finding the cause or allergen can help find relief.



The body is always fighting a battle against things that are not supposed to be in the body. Normally, the body properly

recognizes what is “bad” and shouldn’t be there. However, there can be a mix up in the signaling system, and things that should be normal are viewed as bad for the body. The cells in the body then attack this normal substance resulting in an allergy.

In other words, the immune system is overreacting to normal things. This overreaction of the immune system to normal things causes it to be less effective in keeping out the truly bad things. Yeast and bacteria can take advantage of the opportunity and result in skin and ear infections.

Most allergic reactions do not occur with the first exposure. The first time a substance comes in the body, the cells identify it for future reference. Once your pet is exposed the next time, they recognize the substance as bad and attack it. This is the reason your pet may have been fine for the first vaccine but had a reaction when he received the second booster.

Allergies may also develop suddenly, even after several years.

Acute or Chronic

Signs of an acute (quick) allergic reaction vary depending on the severity. A mild reaction may cause pink coloring of the skin, mild swelling, sneezing, runny nose, eye discharge or possible itching.



This dog has hives

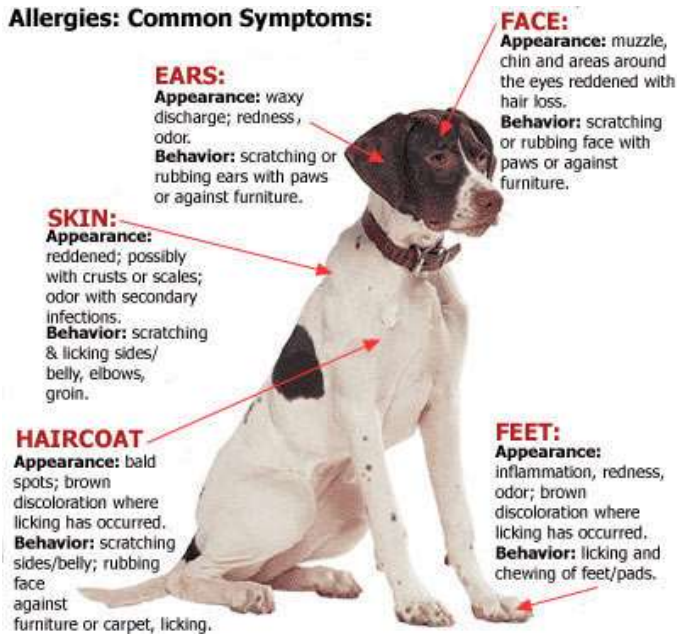
A more moderate reaction may cause hives, mild to moderate swelling, occasional vomiting or diarrhea, or redness of the skin.

A severe reaction can be life threatening and may cause severe swelling of the face and trachea, difficulty breathing, severe vomiting and diarrhea, or seizures. A severe reaction can even stop the heart from beating.

Chronic (long-term) allergies show signs of itchiness (especially of the feet), reddened skin, scabbing and irritation of the skin, dark pigmentation of the skin, or thickening of the skin. They can also have recurring ear or skin infections, nasal and eye discharge, sneezing, and occasional vomiting or diarrhea.



Allergies: Common Symptoms:



allergies to flare up. A blood test for food allergies is also available and can be used as a guideline to find foods to avoid.



Examples of hypoallergenic food

Treatment

Treatment of an allergic reaction consists of antihistamines and steroids. Antihistamines such as Benadryl decrease histamine. Histamine is released by the body and is the cause of the swelling, redness, and itchiness.



The Cause

Determining the cause of allergies can be difficult. Sometimes the cause is not found. Inhalant allergies are usually suspected if your pet has signs (sneezing, itching, etc.) only during a specific time of the year. Harvest season is a typical allergy season. However, your pet can have inhalant allergies year round if the allergen is in the house. This is typical of allergies to dust mites or mold. A blood test or skin test can be performed to help determine inhaled allergens.

Food allergies are typically seen year round. The best way to diagnose food allergies is with a food trial. This involves a hypoallergenic diet (NOT an over the counter allergy diet) that is formulated not to cause an allergic reaction. Your pet needs to eat only the special diet for 2 months. No treats or chewable medicines are allowed since they can interfere with the test. If the allergies stop after 2 months, feed the regular diet again. If the allergies come back, feed the hypoallergenic food again. If the signs go away again, a diagnosis of food allergies is made.

Determining which food involves introducing each ingredient one at a time to find which causes the

Antihistamines work best when given BEFORE an allergic reaction occurs. This is why Benadryl is recommended to be given before a vaccine if the pet has vaccine allergic reactions.

Steroids help decrease the inflammation quickly. They also decrease the immune response to the allergen. A pet with a severe reaction may need to be hospitalized. Baths may be given if the reaction is due to contact with a specific substance. Medicines that cause allergic reactions should be stopped.

Treatment of long-term allergies is more difficult and frustrating. Finding and eliminating the underlying cause is ideal. Most of the time, this is not an option. Long term antihistamines such as hydroxyzine for dogs or chlorpheniramine for cats can be used to help control the signs. Sometimes, the allergies become overwhelming and oral or injectable steroids are needed.

Antibiotics and antifungal medicines may be needed when skin and ear infections occur. These infections will increase your pet's itchiness.

Fish oils help decrease inflammation and boost a healthy immune system. Antioxidants help improve the immune system too.

There are medications that can help modulate or change the immune response. Allergy treatment kits are available if a blood test is performed. The blood test identifies allergens which are then combined in very small amounts. This combination of allergens is then injected into your pet on a set schedule or given as daily drops under the tongue. This exposes the body to very low levels of the allergen so the body can learn to recognize them as normal.



Most owners are able to give allergy treatment injections at home

When dealing with allergies, make sure to keep a list of things your pet may be allergic to. Try to avoid these as much as possible. If unavoidable, try to be patient. Work with your veterinarian to determine the best option to keep your pet comfortable.

