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Allergies

The most common abnormality seen by veterinarians on a daily basis is of the skin. Many diseases can affect the skin, but by far the most common disease of the skin is allergies.

Symptoms of allergies in dogs and cats include but are not limited to itchininess, licking the paws, hair loss, reddened skin, "scabby skin", ear infections, excessively shaking or scratching the ears, or ear pain when rubbed. Dogs and cats do not experience the same symptoms that humans do (facial and respiratory symptoms).

Many things cause allergies. It is easiest to separate the causes first into three categories: Flea allergy dermatitis (dermatitis= inflammation of the skin), Food allergy dermatitis, and Atopic dermatitis (atopic refers to an inhaled allergen causing skin symptoms).

Flea allergies

Many animals can have fleas and not be very itchy. Some animals are very allergic to the flea's saliva and will be extremely itchy with very few fleas. Sometimes the fleas will be so few, we humans may never even see them!! Thankfully, flea allergies are easy to treat with proper flea products and anti-inflammatory drugs.

Food Allergy

Some animals are allergic to ingredients in their food. Food allergies can develop over time, so even though an animal has been eating a certain food all its life, food allergies can develop anytime. Food allergies are often non-responsive to anti-inflammatory therapy and require a hypo-allergenic food trial for diagnosis and treatment.

Atopic dermatitis

Again, this refers to an animal that is allergic to something it is inhaling, but the symptoms are of the skin. These allergens are often seasonal (pollens, grasses, etc.) but can be year round (dust mites, cigarette smoke, mold, etc.). Atopic dermatitis is often responsive to anti-inflammatories, but sometimes requires allergy testing and desensitization shots to control the symptoms. Avoidance of the allergen is always the best therapy, although sometimes impossible.

Allergies often take several visits and varying combinations of treatments to keep your pet comfortable, but control is very attainable with persistence and good communication with your veterinarian. Please call with any questions and please call whenever your pet begins exhibiting the signs of an allergy recurrence. The sooner therapy is instituted the better.