

Allergies

What are the clinical signs in cats and dogs?

Clinical signs may include sneezing, watery eyes, skin rash, itching, vomiting, diarrhea, ear infection, and licking at the feet. Signs may be seasonal, corresponding to the rise and fall in the levels of grass pollens and molds. Allergies associated with the home environment or with foods may produce clinical signs year- round.

How are allergies diagnosed?

Allergies may be diagnosed after analysis of your pet's history and environmental surroundings. After excluding other possible causes, we may prescribe a blood test to evaluate your pet's allergic status. This blood test determines whether your pet is allergic to common substances. Food allergies are diagnosed by a food trial.

How are allergies treated?

Allergies are rarely cured. So the best form of treatment is avoidance, if possible. When avoidance is impossible, the goal is to control symptoms with a combination approach.

- **Fatty acid supplementation:** This dietary vitamin supplement helps to keep the skin and coat as healthy as possible, and has mild anti-inflammatory benefits to help with itching. This supplement takes up to two months to notice helpful effects and should be given every day.
- **Topical treatment:** Topical therapies include medicated shampoos, conditioners, sprays, and lotions. Most topical treatments help relieve symptoms quickly but usually last only 24-48 hours. This method works best in combination with other allergy medications.
- **Antihistamines:** Antihistamines, when combined with fatty acid supplements, will help control symptoms in about 50% of allergy patients. However, some trial and error may be needed in order to find the right one for your pet. Your pet should be on the antihistamine for at least 2 weeks before determining its effectiveness. Antihistamines are safe for long term use but may cause side effects such as drowsiness.
- **Steroids:** Steroids are very effective when treating seasonal allergies and are useful for short-term treatment and severe flare-ups. However, long term use of steroids may cause severe and permanent side effects such as liver disease, adrenal gland disease and an increased risk of diabetes. Therefore we recommend using steroids when fatty acids, antihistamines, and topical treatments are not enough to control symptoms.

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- **Cyclosporine:** This new anti-inflammatory drug may be used when steroids are causing too many side effects. This treatment should only be used after other treatments have failed and in cases where the diagnosis has been confirmed by allergy testing.
- **Hyposensitization Injections:** Based on the results of allergy blood testing, a series of injections containing specific amounts of the allergens are given into the patient over a period of time. This allows your pet to become desensitized to the substances and reduces the allergic response. Signs of improvement can be seen after 4-6 months, with maximum benefit after 9 months. While hyposensitization treatment is effective in 60-70% of allergic pets, many still need the previously mentioned therapies.

What is a food allergy?

With allergies, the pet's immune system "overreacts" to environmental substances. In food allergies, the substance is one or more ingredients, often the protein source, in the pet's current food. Pets are not born with food allergies; they develop over time but do not develop from a recent diet change.

What are the signs of food allergy?

The signs are similar to seasonal allergies, which include itching around the face, belly, feet and legs, vomiting, diarrhea, sneezing, and recurrent ear infections. In cats, food allergies usually cause itching around the face and neck.

How is a food allergy diagnosed?

To determine if your pet is allergic to its food, a food trial must be done. A food trial involves feeding your pet a hypoallergenic prescription food for 10-12 weeks. This diet is based on either "novel protein" or "hydrolyzed protein" sources. Novel protein sources are food products the pet has never eaten before, such as venison and potato. Hydrolyzed proteins are protein molecules that have been broken down into sizes that do not trigger a response by the immune system. We recommend Hills Z/D Ultra (hydrolyzed protein). Regardless of which type of food is used, *it is vital that the pet be fed this diet exclusively.* During this time, your pet may not have any treats, chews, bones, vitamins, or table-scrap. If the clinical signs resolve while on the diet, the pet may have a food allergy. To confirm this, return to the original food. Most pets with food allergies will develop clinical signs again within 14 days of returning to the original food. If the pet is doing well, however, many owners opt to stay with the "hypoallergenic diet" indefinitely.

*****All the commercial prescription diets have a 100% guarantee. If your pet does not like the food, please return the unused portion for a complete refund.*****

What happens if the food trial fails?

If the hypoallergenic food was fed exclusively and the pet did not eat anything that may have interfered with the test, it is likely that either your pet does not have food allergies or that it has seasonal allergies in addition. Many animals will have both food and seasonal allergies. Another condition that appears similar to allergies is *Sarcoptes mange*. *Sarcoptes mange* is a skin mite that causes red, itchy skin. It may be diagnosed by a skin scraping, but a treatment trial is often needed.