

# **BRIDGEWATER VETERINARY HOSPITAL**

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## **CAN MY PET REALLY BE ALLERGIC?**

### **Can dogs and cats really have allergies?**

Yes. Cats with allergies are seen occasionally. Dogs, however, are quite commonly bothered by allergies and the problem is likely to persist for life. Also, certain breeds are more prone to be allergic than others.

### **Do allergic dogs sneeze and have runny noses?**

Not usually. These symptoms are more likely to be associated with people who have allergies.

### **How do pets show their allergic symptoms?**

The symptoms can be highly variable because of individual differences in sensitivity and exposure. Itchy feet, ears and inflammation of the skin are some of the symptoms associated with allergy in dogs. Cats may show skin conditions as well as asthma.

### **What causes a pet to have an allergy?**

The tendency to allergy may be inherited. It is known that once your pet is exposed to an allergen, sensitivity is established, and then every time he is exposed to the allergen again the reaction occurs.

### **What substances cause allergies?**

Allergies are caused by "allergens." An allergen is any substance or material that can cause a reaction in the allergic patient. Some examples of allergens are pollens, wool, mold spores, house dust, and some foods.

### **When do pets develop allergic reactions?**

Allergic reactions to inhaled substances begin to appear at 6-24 months of age. The reaction can then occur within a few minutes after exposure, but signs sometimes may not appear for several days or weeks.

### **What if your pet goes untreated?**

The itchy sensation and inflammation of the skin is likely to lead to self-trauma by rubbing, licking and chewing. This may result in extensive and severe damage to the skin, and that sets up conditions conducive to infection.

### **How can I tell if my dog is allergic?**

Ask your veterinarian. First of all, it must be determined whether your dog's symptoms are caused by an allergen. Sometimes the secondary causes are so troublesome that the real cause is difficult to identify until secondary problems, such as bacterial infection, can be controlled.

### **How can I help the doctor?**

We will need a detailed history of your pet's problems, including such things as: age at onset of allergic symptoms, seasonal occurrence, first signs of trouble, subsequent signs and any correlation between the sensitivity and amount of exposure.

Usually, the first experience with inhalant allergens coincides with plant pollination. In time, however, seasonal patterns may be lost as the patient becomes sensitive to dust and other materials. Observation of flare-ups will help to determine which inhalant allergens are important to the patient.

**691 ROUTE 202/206 NORTH • BRIDGEWATER, NJ 08807**

**908.704.6700**

**WWW.BRIDGEWATERVET.COM**



## What are some common allergens?

### A. *Inhalant allergens:*

- (1) Pollen—especially the wind-pollinated weeds and grasses. These “aeroallergens” travel for many miles. They have been found as far as 200 miles out over the Atlantic Ocean. Ragweed and grasses are among the most potent pollens.
- (2) Mold spores - these are microscopic particles that produce “mildew,” musty smells in damp basements, “fungus” growth on food and in piles of decaying grass and leaves. Spores are the means by which the fungi travel and reproduce. Mold spores are very potent allergens to both dogs and people.
- (3) House dust - this is a combination of all the fine particulate material that floats in the air in our living area.
- (4) Feathers and dander.

B. **Contact, dietary, and drug allergies** may also contribute to allergic disorders in dogs.

***The inhalant type (A) allergies may be confirmed by specific allergy testing.***

### What is allergy testing?

After the detailed history of your pet is evaluated for indications that allergy is likely, allergy testing may be done to confirm that allergy is involved. Allergy testing may be two types: blood testing and/or skin testing. Based on the test results, the history can be reviewed and we can tell you which allergens are most likely bothering your pet, and then treat him accordingly.

### What can be done to give my pet relief?

- A. **Avoidance**--reduction of allergens is important. It is most helpful in contact and dietary allergies. In inhalant allergies, feathers, aerosols, and smoke are some examples of environmental allergens that can be reduced or avoided.
- B. **Antihistamines**--these may be prescribed for relief of symptoms during minor or short episodes. They are most helpful for canine patients that show respiratory symptoms as part of their allergies.
- C. **Corticosteroids**--these are prescribed for control of more severe signs. The relief can be dramatic. However, their side effects limit these drugs to careful considered use.
- D. **Hyposensitization**--this method is prescribed for those patients whose allergies span seasons, or year round; whose symptoms are not controlled by the use of antihistamines, or corticosteroids in reasonable amounts; or where these drugs cannot be used in particular patient.

### What is hyposensitization?

We may recommend hyposensitization just as an allergist would recommend “allergy shots” for a person. This procedure involves giving small doses of the offending allergens to the patient (animal or human) in gradually increasing amounts. After a period of time, which varies considerably from patient to patient, these procedures reduce the sensitivity to the allergic symptoms without the undesirable side effects of corticosteroids and similar drugs.

This procedure may require dose adjustment and modifications according to the needs of the individual patient.

### What is the best course of therapy for my pet?

In the treatment of allergic disorders, therapy may vary widely from patient to patient. This is why, for your pet’s well being, your cooperation and participation in the diagnosis and treatment is essential for success.