

DOGS & ALLERGIES

~ What you need to know ~

Summer is here! Beautiful weather flowers and trees in bloom everywhere! While many of us find this to be the most wonderful time of the year. There are others who find this time of year incredibly annoying due to the onset of allergies.

In people, allergies most commonly manifest themselves as sneezing, coughing, and itchy, watery eyes. In dogs, allergies tend to become just one great big itch. In the most severe cases, dogs might rub their faces along the furniture and carpets, incessantly lick at paws, frequently get rashes on their stomachs and arm pits, and have red and sore backsides. Owners of these chronically itchy pets will sum it up in one word for you - FRUSTRATING! Many will complain of long sleepless nights listening to their dogs lick and scratch and sometimes pace because the dogs can't sleep either! Although they can not be cured, allergies can be well managed. It takes two very important factors: your determination to stick with it, and staying in frequent communication with your veterinarian.

You will need to pay close attention to your dog's scratching behavior. For example, note whether the signs are worse in the summer when your dog is swimming all the time; does it happen more often in the fall when you close all the windows and turn the furnace on; or is it all year long? Does your dog itch the worst around it's face and tail, paws and stomach, or all over? Keep track of all these things and ask for them to be documented in your pet's medical record. Doing this will be helpful to your veterinarian in creating a plan to head off your pet's itching by starting antihistamines or other topical skin products before your pet's most severe allergy season.

Nutrition is an important factor in a lot disease treatments, allergies included. Itchy faces and red sore backsides can be a symptom of food allergies. The most common food allergies in pets are due to proteins used most frequently in pet food, i.e. chicken, beef, and lamb. There are also theories that there are intolerances to certain grains like wheat and corn. To know for sure if your dog has food allergies you need to try a food trial. This is done by putting your dog on a nonallergenic diet. This is a specially processed diet where the protein molecules are broken down so small the body doesn't recognize them as proteins during digestion, and thus eliminates the allergic reaction. Some people might also try switching to another food with a different protein and grain source (a hypoallergenic diet) but this is not quite as reliable. For a food trial to be effective, no table scraps or treats apart from the recommended diet are allowed over the entire course of the trial. This means a commitment from you to a minimum of ten weeks of feeding only the special diet to your dog.

Allergies are one of the toughest medical managements out there, but it can be done. Don't give up early. Stick with the treatment plan for the recommended amount of time. If things are getting worse go back to your veterinarian and try the next step. There is an entire arsenal of allergy fighting weapons, but it might take a while. My veterinarian says my Pekingese is the worst chronic-allergy dog he has ever had in his practice. It took me

eight years of hard work, but she is now in a great place - minimally itchy with no medications, just a good diet, medicated shampoos, and a skin supplement, all at a very reasonable cost. Seeing her so comfortable is definitely worth all the struggles we had getting there!

This information is provided by:

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