

Allergies, Environmental (Atopy/Canine Atopic Dermatitis)

What is it?

An allergy is an abnormal immune response to a substance. The dog's immune system ramps up when exposed to the "irritant". Allergies are usually classified as environmental (inhalant) or food related (ingestion).



What causes it?

Most of our environment and food is tolerated by the general population. But the immune system is very complicated, and can start to develop antibodies to something generally considered safe. Enough of an immune response, and you have an allergy. Environmental allergies usually start to show between 6 months-3 years of age.

Signs & Symptoms

Itching (face, ears, front legs and abdomen) and chewing of certain areas (especially feet). Red eyes and runny noses are possible, as is a history of frequent ear infections. You may notice symptoms waxing and waning depending on when pollen is present and pollen counts in the air.

How is it diagnosed?

There is no laboratory test to diagnose a food allergy. Blood panels and skin tests can show you that the dog has an immune response to, but they're not considered diagnostic. Diagnostic criteria include age, breed, signs, and disease history. Although allergy testing cannot diagnose, it is useful information to identify the allergens. It is useful information to identify the allergens. Skin testing is the preferred method for developing immunotherapy treatment.

Prognosis:

Prognosis is good, but this is usually a lifelong condition that will require some degree of management for symptoms. There is no way to prevent allergies.

Treatment

Environmental allergies can be well controlled using prescription medication. Apoquel (pill form) is the current standard, and is given once or twice daily. Atopica is another option (also a tablet). Cytopoint is an injection that can provide relief for 4-8 weeks between administrations. If allergic to high-pollen season irritants, medication may not be needed in the winter when those plants are dormant.

Immunotherapy (allergy "vaccines") are also a consideration. This treatment consists of exposure to very small amounts of the identified allergen, with the goal being to de-sensitize the dog's immune response.

Minimizing the dog's exposure to the allergen (regular cleaning of carpets, a HEPA filter), wiping the coat with a damp cloth after outdoors exposure to pollen are advisable.

This information is not meant to be a substitute for veterinary care.

Always follow the instructions provided by your veterinarian.

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