



Allergy Treatment

Treating allergies can be a frustrating and time consuming process. You may need to use a combination of therapies along with changes in the home. If your pet has food allergies, treatment is with special diets or avoiding all foods that trigger the allergic reaction. Most of the time your pet will be comfortable if you follow these guidelines.



First Line of Treatment

When your pet first has allergy problems that causes itchiness and inflammation, the usual medications are antihistamines and steroids. These may work well initially but steroids are not good for long-term use.

Fish oil reduces inflammation and promotes a healthy immune system. This is an ideal supplement for pets with allergy problems.

Bathing your pet to remove pollen and dust on a regular basis will help as well as wiping paws after coming in from outdoors. If your pet is prone to skin infections, bathing frequently with a medicated shampoo will help kill the bacteria and yeast causing the infections.

Keeping the windows closed and your pet indoors on windy days will help avoid exposure to pollen. Vacuum frequently or eliminate carpets. Use hypoallergenic furnace filters and change them often. Wash bedding in hot water regularly. Keep humidity low in the house to discourage molds. All of these steps will help to remove things that could trigger allergies.

Use a good flea product religiously. Don't skip a dose – ever! Many pets with allergies to other things are also allergic to flea bites. When fleas are controlled it helps to reduce the severity of allergies.

Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy is using the immune system's response to fight allergies. Immunotherapy exposes the body to small amounts of antigens (the things that trigger the allergies). Over time, the amount increases. The goal is that the body gets used to the antigen and doesn't overreact. This is the same process as when kids get "allergy shots".

Before doing immunotherapy, your pet needs to have a blood test to determine which antigens are causing the allergic reaction. Based on this report, pets will receive their own customized allergen solution. There are two different options available for immunotherapy. You can give your pet very small injections under the skin or you can give daily drops under the tongue.

Immunotherapy Injections



These injections are very small, and most pets don't even notice them. The injections are given every 4 days initially. This interval is gradually increased based on your pet's response. Most pets are then maintained on injections every 2-4 weeks.

The first 11 injections should be given at the clinic so that we can monitor for any signs of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). After that, we can teach you how to give the injections at home.

Immunotherapy Drops



The drops, given under the tongue, must be given twice daily on a routine schedule. Most pets find the drops to be tasty. No food, treats, or water should be given with the drops or for 10 minutes after. This allows the drops to stay in the mouth as long as possible.

You will need to determine which form of immunotherapy will work best for you and your pet. If you are comfortable with giving injections and your pet tolerates them, injections are likely the best option for you since they eventually become more spread out and are easier for time management.

If your pet hates injections or you do not feel comfortable giving them, you will probably want to do the drops, though your schedule must be consistent. If your schedule is irregular or if you are frequently gone and cannot have someone else treat your pet, you may want to reconsider the injections.

For immunotherapy injections, your pet should start showing improvement in allergy signs within 4-6 months. Your pet should stay on the injections for a full 12 months to determine if they are managing your pet's allergies.

For immunotherapy drops, your pet should start showing improvement in 1-3 months. To determine if the drops are working, your pet should receive drops for a full 10 months.

For dogs that did not have any improvements with injections, 50% showed improvement with drops. So luckily, there may be another option.

Immune Modulation

The immune system can go into overdrive and start perceiving regular things (such as plant pollen) as dangerous. The immune system then tries to fight off the invader as if it were an infection which results in allergies. The route in which this is done is very complicated with many components.

Luckily, recent research is identifying the components responsible for itching and inflammation due to allergies. Now there are several options available to change how these components interact with the body's cells and thus decrease allergies.

Immune modulators are medicines that change how the immune system functions. They act on one or more of the components that cause allergic reactions.



The older forms are not as specific to allergies and will change how the immune system reacts to other things as well. This can make your pet more susceptible to other infections, including skin infections.

Each medicine works differently in each pet, therefore, you may try different medicines before you figure out what works best. We also need to treat any secondary skin infection or the treatment will not be successful.

Available options

Atopica®

This medicine is a broad immune modulator. That means it changes how the immune system works by suppressing one of the major immune system cells (T-cells) as well as one of the components of inflammation.



This medicine comes as a capsule that is initially given on an empty stomach every day for 30 days and then tapered down to the lowest working dose. Atopica can take up to a month to see significant decrease in itchiness. Atopica is available for cats and dogs 6 months of age or older.

Apoquel®



This pill targets more specific components of inflammation and itching when compared to Atopica. Because it is more specific, it has less undesirable side effects. It also works quicker and itchiness can decrease in as little as 4 hours without the negative side effects of steroids.

This medicine is initially given twice daily for 2 weeks, then decreased to one daily dose as maintenance. It can be given with or without food which makes administration easier. Apoquel is for dogs 12 months of age or older.

Cytopoint™

This medicine is a canine antibody that has been modified to target the specific component identified to cause itchiness. Since it is the most specific immune modulator, it has very few side effects.

It comes as an injection that is given in the clinic every 4-8 weeks. Improvement in itchiness is often seen within hours but may take 24-48 hours. Cytopoint is for dogs of any age.



Summary

We have more options than ever for treating allergies. It may take some time to discover the best option for your pet, but it's worth it to provide lasting relief. Start early when your pet first shows signs of allergies to get the problem under control quickly.