

ITCHY DOG OWNERS GUIDE



Owning a dog with a severe allergic itch problem can be upsetting and frustrating for the whole family, not to mention distressing for your beloved pet.

Depending on the cause of the allergy, some dogs are itchy all year round and some only itch at certain times of the year.

The good news is that innovative and effective therapies are available to ensure that neither the dog or family need suffer as a result.

You may be concerned that in the past you have been unable to resolve the problem, but with understanding of allergic conditions improving all the time, effective treatments and solutions are available.



What is an allergy?

Dogs, just like people, can show symptoms of allergy when their immune systems recognise certain everyday substances as foreign. Even though these substances are harmless to most animals, a dog with allergies will have an extreme reaction to them. The skin is one of the most common organs to show symptoms of allergy. Dogs are most likely to show signs of skin allergies at 2-3 years old but they can occur at any age.

What are the symptoms?

- Increased scratching
- Red itchy skin
- Chewing, especially around the base of the tail and paws
- Itchy ears and recurring ear infections
- Constant licking
- Dogs with an allergic skin condition may also suffer from skin infections, which may cause hair loss, scabs or crusts on the skin.

What are the common allergens?

- Various types of pollen
- Fungal spores
- Tree bark
- Flea bites
- Allergens in food
- House dust mites
- Grasses

There are many others and your vet may need to run a number of tests to find out the true cause of the allergy.

The stages of treatment

Stage 1

Your vet will rule out potential infectious causes for the itchiness by testing for ectoparasites such as fleas and mites as well as secondary bacterial and fungal infection. If these are present, they will need to be treated directly but there is often still a further underlying cause. If these treatments do not solve the itchiness, then allergic dermatitis could be suspected, and your vet will move to Stage 2.

Stage 2

Your pet may be prescribed a treatment to relieve the immediate itch and will advise how to use it. This might include antihistamines, steroids, Apoquel, Cytosporin injections or a topical cream or ointment.

Further investigations then may need to be carried out to determine the possibly cause of the itch (allergic dermatitis) such as flea allergy, food allergy, grass/pollen allergy or house dust and storage mite allergy.

These investigations may include blood tests for grass/pollen/house dust and storage mite allergy or a special diet to exclude food as the underlying cause for the allergy. There are two main options for an exclusion diet:

1. Novel protein diet – a high-quality food that contains a protein source (fish, venison, insects) that your dog has never had before
2. Hydrolyzed diet – a diet which has been processed in a way that makes the food molecules so small that your dog's immune system won't recognise them as allergens. Examples include Purina HA, RCW Anallergenic, Hills z/d. These are not the same as a hypoallergenic diet

The food trial needs to be around 6-8 weeks long and must be exclusive. In other words, your dog should have no other food or treats during this time. Your vet may also offer some itch relief medication during the food trial, to make sure your dog is comfortable. They will advise a timed withdrawal of the itch relief medication, to see if the food trial is working.

Stage 3

If Atopic dermatitis is diagnosed (allergies to grass/pollen/house or storage mites), your vet will develop a treatment plan for managing your pet's atopic dermatitis long-term including one or more of the following: itch relief, environment management, diet, flea and parasite control, immunotherapy, skin barrier therapy, and a plan for flare ups. This will likely involve frequent re-examinations to assess the response to the treatment plan in the initial stages.

Further Reading

[Skin allergies and Atopic Dermatitis](#)

Itchy cats