



Bloom Animal Hospital, P.C.

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Allergy, Skin & Ear Clinic for Pets

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ATOPIC DERMATITIS

Atopic dermatitis (AD) or eczema is a long-lasting (chronic) condition that causes itching (or licking, chewing, scratching or biting) and inflammation of the skin and ears. It may affect any area, but it usually affects the face, front legs, feet, ears, armpits, trunk, and abdomen. It may be persistent or it may flare periodically and then subside. It may affect the entire body. This is in contrast to flea allergy where the rump, tail, groin and thighs are affected. About 1/2 the pets with AD will also be allergic to fleas and so will have symptoms of both diseases

Animals with AD have two main problems. The first is an abnormal skin surface (barrier) which leads to sensitive skin. The second is an overactive immune system that reacts to a variety of flare factors. Recognized flare factors include: dry skin, food allergens, parasites (fleas), infection (bacterial or yeast), and environmental allergens. When a flare occurs, your pet will itch more and may develop red, flaky, and/or infected skin or ears.

Although there is no cure for AD, it can be treated very effectively in the through a combination of prevention (learning and avoiding the triggers of the allergic reactions) and a variety of therapies/medications.

Treatment for all animals with AD includes:

1. Bathing and clipping the hair coat to a short length (10 or 15 blade) which helps to decrease exposure and contact to environmental triggers. Bathing with appropriate veterinary shampoos will not dry out the skin;
2. Restore the skin's barrier function with nutrients and topical products.

Additional treatment options include:

1. Allergen specific immunotherapy (ASIT) is the ONLY method currently available to help IMPROVE the health of the immune system (vs. just treating the symptoms). ASIT involves giving a series of injections containing specific environmental (not food) antigens to which your pet is sensitive. In order to determine your pet's specific environmental allergy, intradermal testing is performed. This is a technique in which a tiny amount of allergens are injected into the skin. The skin is then evaluated for any reactions to the allergens. Once identified, you can try avoiding them, but in 99% of cases avoidance is not effective as the sole treatment. ASIT makes it possible to desensitize your pet to these environmental triggers. By itself, it may control AD OR make the symptoms significantly less severe. It is the only treatment that can prevent OR decrease the frequency of yeast or bacterial skin infections or ear infections. At the Allergy, Skin and Ear Clinic for Pets, 75 % of AD cases triggered by environmental allergens respond to ASIT, needing either no other medication or less medication. ASIT stimulates your pet's own immune system, which prevents the allergic reaction from occurring. You will need to give subcutaneous injections every 7-21 days for the LIFETIME of your pet. It takes time for the immune system to respond to the ASIT, so it may take 6 to 12 months to take effect;
2. A food trial may be done to identify possible food antigen triggers so they can be avoided;

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3. Steroids for instant predictable relief. Side effects may include excessive drinking and/or urinating, and an increase in appetite causing weight gain. If used for prolonged periods, steroids make the animal more susceptible to skin and urinary infections. They can also stress the liver and kidneys. Therefore, we try to avoid long-term use of steroids, but they may be the only treatment that will adequately control your pet's symptoms;
4. Antihistamines used together with essential fatty acids (EFAs) will help control 20-25% of animals with AD that is triggered by environmental allergens. The only side effect of antihistamines can be grogginess. EFAs have no side effects, but they may take up to 60 days to be effective. Antihistamines and EFAs work better in combination than either product by itself. These products, however, do not help prevent or treat bacterial or yeast skin infections or ear infections. They are also not effective for flares caused by food or fleas.
5. Cyclosporine is another alternative to steroids. It works by suppressing the immune system, but is safer than steroids. Cyclosporine is effective 50-60 % of the time. Like antihistamines, it doesn't help prevent or treat bacterial or yeast skin infections or ear infections. It is not effective against flares caused by fleas, but it may be effective for flares caused by food

Canine Atopic Dermatitis

