

# **Allergies!!**

## **Allergy Season is Here!**

Humans aren't the only ones who suffer from allergies. Dogs and Cats can be allergic to anything from certain foods to everyday things like pollen, grasses, insects (especially fleas), certain chemical-based products and even carpet fibers.

However, it can sometimes be difficult for dog and cat owners to recognize the signs of pet allergies. Unlike their owners who sneeze and get watery eyes during allergy season, pets tend to react differently. One of your first clues that your dog or cat may have allergies is excessive itching / scratching.

Other common allergy signs include:

Chewing at the feet; feet may appear inflamed.

Constant licking or chewing especially on their side or groin areas.

Skin may appear dry, flaky/crusty, or reddened.

Waxy or black discharge from ears; also, inflamed ears and constant ear infections.

Puffy, tearing and reddened eyes that they may rub often.

Pet's allergies can be year round or seasonal, just like humans. Watch for symptoms and also watch the local news for pollen/mold counts.

## ***Food Allergies in Pets***

Food allergies are one of the least likely causes of allergies in dogs and cats. True food allergies only account for about 15% of allergy problems in pets.

Certain food ingredients can cause an allergic reaction in your pet, although you need to be careful that you are not confusing a food allergy with food intolerance. Usually a food allergy will cause itching, skin rashes, and hair loss. Food intolerances tend to cause vomiting, diarrhea, and excessive gas. The most common food allergies are usually beef and lamb, as well as wheat gluten, chicken, eggs, and corn. Some pets also have reactions to artificial coloring, flavorings, preservatives, and pesticide residue.

Certain breeds, such as Siamese cats, West Highland Terriers, Cocker Spaniels, and Irish Setters appear more likely to develop food allergies and intolerances.

In the past, pet owners had to feed homemade recipes, but today the latest innovation in pet food uses the process of hydrolyzation to break down protein molecules to a size that does not allow an allergic response. The same process has been used for years in special formulas for infants that are sensitive or allergic to milk protein.

These special foods, at the Flanary Vet Clinic, include Hill's z/d, d/d, and Eukanuba fish and potato, and others.

## ***Other Common Allergens***

In western Kentucky and southern Illinois, mold is common and may be the cause of your pet's allergy problem. In our area this can be a year long allergy versus a seasonal one.

If you suspect mold may be your pet's allergy problem, there are a few things you can do to make your pet more comfortable. Keep the humidity low in your house by running the air conditioner regularly. Fix any leaks. Use the exhaust fan in the bathroom when showering, and when cooking make sure the exhaust over the stove vents outside.

Check your air conditioning unit to make sure there is no rust buildup in the condenser pan. Clean out mold, mildew and dust wherever you find it: bathrooms, mini-blinds, bookshelves, ceiling fan paddles, and electronics.

Believe it or not, your dog could be allergic to your cat! Cat allergen is very lightweight, and very sticky. It sticks to walls, furniture, and carpet. It can also stay active in the environment for at least 10 years.

Your pet can also be allergic to you! Yes, people put out allergens also.

No one understands why one pet develops allergies another does not. Genetics are thought to play a part.

People and pets are often allergic to the same things.

*"If your pet is allergic to fleas, one bite can cause itching for up to three weeks."*

## ***Flea Allergies***

A flea allergy has always been the most common allergy seen with dogs and cats. When a flea bites your pet, it deposits a small amount of saliva onto the skin. Your pet can develop flea allergy dermatitis, FAD, which is a reaction to this saliva. The reaction causes severe itching, which is very uncomfortable to your pet.

If a dog or cat is allergic to fleas, one bite can cause itching for up to three weeks. Just imagine if one flea bite can do that, how miserable your pet would be with 50 to 100 flea bites!

Fortunately, today there have been new advances in flea control to prevent FAD. Frontline Plus is the safest and longest acting flea product available. Frontline kills fleas and controls flea eggs, flea larvae, and all stages of ticks.

Frontline is gentle enough to use on young animals 8 weeks and older. By using Frontline, a flea does not even have to bite your pet in order for the flea product to work, therefore, preventing any saliva transfer that causes FAD.

Many pets have allergic reactions to over the counter flea products, and they can also make pets very sick. Frontline is available at veterinary clinics and is safe to use with allergy pets.

With the introduction of new flea control products, no dog or cat should be allowed to suffer from Flea Allergy Dermatitis.

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## ***Helping Your Allergy Pet***

The key to treating your pet's allergies is to identify the source. This can be challenging, however, Dr. Flanary and the Flanary Veterinary staff can work with you to help solve the mystery.

Here are some things that you can do to help ease your pet's discomfort:

- Bathe your dog/cat once every two weeks with a specialized shampoo.
- Brush your pet gently on a regular basis. This will help distribute oils, and will prevent matting or tangling that can also irritate skin.
- Dust and vacuum your home often, but be sure to keep your pet out of the room until you are finished.
- Keep your pet indoors while you are mowing the lawn, or during periods when there is a lot of pollen in the air.
- Change furnace and air filters frequently. If possible, run the air conditioner when it is hot and use a dehumidifier to prevent the occurrence of allergy-irritating molds in your home.
- Use hypoallergenic soap to wash your pet's bedding. A lot of laundry detergents contain perfumes that can irritate your pet's skin. Try switching to unscented laundry soap when you are washing anything that comes in close contact to your pet.
- Have your pet examined by the doctor at the Flanary Vet Clinic to determine the right allergy medication and to check for bacterial infections in the skin. Also, ask if allergy testing and immunotherapy is right for your pet.

## ***Allergy Relief and Immunotherapy***

Is your dog or cat a chronic allergy pet? If your pet is constantly having problems with allergies, licking, chewing, etc., there are three options for relief:

1. Total avoidance. This option is usually impossible unless fleas are the cause. If you know what your dog or cat is allergic to decreasing the exposure can lessen the symptoms.
2. Treating the symptoms. The use of medication can help relieve your pet's allergies. However, they should only be used when needed under direction of your veterinarian. Steroids are commonly used and are helpful, but may have some side effects.
3. Immunotherapy. This is the process of giving increasingly larger doses of specific allergens to the pet. The animal's immune system gradually becomes less sensitive to these allergens.

To determine what your pet is allergic to, a blood sample is simply taken from your pet and sent to a laboratory. From the results of the tests, they can formulate treatment vials that are specific to the allergens to which your pet is overly sensitive.

Immunotherapy is becoming a more common way of treating pet allergies, especially for the chronic allergy patient.

Your pet relies on you, so ask Dr. Flanary the best way to help your allergic pet and if immunotherapy could be the right choice.

*"The animal's immune system gradually becomes less sensitive to these allergens."*

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## ***Bathing Your Pet***

Choosing a shampoo is as important as choosing the proper food for your pet. Dr. Flanary and staff can assist you with this. Some shampoos are for routine use, while others are medicated for specific purposes and needs.

Human shampoo should not be used on dogs and cats. Your pet's skin is quite different from your own skin. The average pH of dog skin is 7.5, while the average human skin pH is 5.5. A common belief is that shampooing your pet is harmful to the skin and hair. This is not true, but using the wrong shampoo can be harmful. Shampooing once every 2 weeks is recommended unless your pet has a skin condition and requires specific medicated baths more frequently.

Here are some tips on bathing your pet:

1. Use warm water, not hot, rinse your pet well. (Hand-held shower heads are ideal for this.)
2. Apply a sufficient amount of shampoo to the top of the neck and along the back of your pet.
3. Work shampoo into a rich lather, adding more water if necessary.
4. The face and ears should be washed with a soapy washcloth to avoid getting soap into the eyes and ears.
5. Rinse shampoo thoroughly from your pet until water runs clear.
6. Repeat steps 2 through 4 and allow shampoo to set for 5 – 10 minutes.
7. Again, rinse shampoo thoroughly from pet until water runs clear of any shampoo.

Be sure to dry your pet with clean towels and work to avoid it getting chilled. You may use a hairdryer but be cautious so that it is not too hot.

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## **What is a Pyoderma?**

Pets that have allergies will often have a pyoderma associated with it. A pyoderma is a common bacterial skin infection often referred to as a Staph infection. Other organisms may be involved but it is usually caused by a *Staphylococcus intermedius* organism.

Some *Staphylococci* normally reside on the skin, but as long as the skin is healthy, these bacteria remain dormant. But once the skin is irritated, they can invade the area and rapidly multiply.

Staph infections usually arise from scratching. Causes of scratching include fleas, allergies, and irritating chemicals, such as over the counter flea and tick products.

Staph infections on the skin make distinguishing lesions. They can begin as a red area on the skin with a pimple-like pustule. They also look like a circular red area with a crusty edge and hair loss. This can be confused with ringworm, so it is best to have Dr. Flanary examine any skin condition to receive proper treatment.

The treatment for this condition is to administer a suitable antibiotic for 3 weeks or longer. Along with antibiotic, antibacterial shampoos are also helpful in bringing the infection under control.

A Staph infection can also be the cause of scratching in cases where pets are allergic to the bacteria. In these cases, pyodermas are often reoccurring and require additional treatment.

There are different types of *Staphylococci* and transmission of the pet type to people is extremely rare.