



## **Veterinary Dermatology Center, P.A.**

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# **Atopic Dermatitis**

### **Also Known As:**

Allergic inhalant dermatitis, atopy, environmental allergies, pollen allergies

### **Cause:**

The most common allergens include airborne pollens from grasses, trees, weeds, and fungal spores. Indoor allergens include natural fibers such as wool and household dust mites. In addition, some animals are allergic to the dander from other animals in the same dwelling.

### **Treatment:**

Treatment involves the avoidance of identified allergens when possible. Other therapies include fatty acid supplements, antihistamines, corticosteroids, Atopica, Apoquel, Cytopoint, and immunotherapy (allergy shots or drops). Owners should be aware that long-term use of steroids can result in complications including iatrogenic Cushing's disease, diabetes, and worsening bacterial or fungal skin infections. Immunotherapy (allergy shots or drops) is formulated specifically for individual animals and is administered by an injection under the skin or as drops in the mouth. Improvement of symptoms can take three to twelve months. Immunotherapy is successful in reducing itching in 70-75% of pets. Topical therapy with shampoos, rinses, sprays, or mousses can also be beneficial.

### **Affected Animals:**

Dogs, cats, horses, etc. Dog breeds predisposed to atopy include beagles, Boston terriers, cairn terriers, shar-peis, dalmatians, English bulldogs, English setters, golden retrievers, Labrador retrievers, Lhasa apsos, miniature schnauzers, Scottish terriers, West Highland white terriers, and wirehaired fox terriers. There are no documented breed predilections in cats.

### **Overview:**

Like humans, dogs and cats can be allergic to pollens, mold spores, and other allergens that appear in the environment seasonally, as well as substances found within the house, such as dust and animal dander. While people tend to respond to these various allergens by sneezing and developing watery eyes, animals react by getting very irritated, itchy skin. This leads to constant scratching and chewing which can cause trauma to the skin, skin and ear infections, and extreme discomfort. Generally, symptoms worsen with age and can be controlled, but not completely eliminated. Atopy tends to occur in dogs between one to six years of age. Feline atopy can occur at any age. It is not uncommon for animals to have atopy in conjunction with other allergies such as food hypersensitivity and flea allergy dermatitis.

**Clinical signs/Symptoms:**

Common symptoms include an often intense itching, which results in the pet constantly scratching and biting its irritated skin. Areas most commonly affected include the feet, the muzzle or face, armpits, groin, and ears. Symptoms are initially seasonal in some animals and usually worsen with age. Recurrent skin and ear infections are commonly noted. Secondary skin abnormalities will result from the trauma caused by scratching the itch. These include redness, hair loss, crusts and scaling, ear problems, hair that is stained brown from saliva, and skin infections. Cats may vary widely in their symptoms which can include facial itchiness, hair loss in symmetric patterns, raised and open sores, and bumps with bloody scabs.

**Diagnosis:**

Your veterinarian will ask about your pet's history of symptoms. During the physical examination, the presence of itching and skin lesions will be assessed. Before concluding the diagnosis is atopic dermatitis, your veterinarian will need to rule out other skin diseases including food hypersensitivity, flea allergy dermatitis, sarcoptic mange, contact dermatitis, bacterial infection of the skin, and yeast infection of the skin. Diagnostic procedures can include skin surface cytology, skin scrapings, fungal cultures, and bloodwork and urinalysis. Intradermal skin testing is the most accurate of the allergy tests; this procedure should be performed by a veterinary dermatologist or an experienced veterinarian. Blood allergy tests are less accurate than skin testing but might be needed under certain circumstances.

**Prognosis:**

Atopy is a life-long disease that tends to worsen with age. Therefore, treatment is required for the duration of the pet's life.

**Prevention:**

Prevention includes avoiding known allergens by maintaining a dust-free house, closing windows, and keeping your pet indoors during high pollen seasons. It is also important to minimize complicating factors such as fleas, a dirty haircoat, and skin or ear infections. Because the predisposition to inhalant allergies is genetically transmitted, affected animals should not be bred.