



A Natural Solution to Itchy Pets

By Maritza B. Campbell, Bowman Animal Hospital & Cat Clinic

Our environment is constantly changing and our bodies are always adjusting. We develop allergies to everything: the foods we eat, the lotions we wear, and the storm of pollen that descends upon us each spring. Our pets also share our sensitivities to the environment. We often focus on the appearance of our pets as we want them to have beautiful fur coats. We also want to avoid the sounds of constant licking and gnawing at paws and hindquarters. Most of all, we want our pets to be comfortable and itch free.

Veterinarians often care for pets with skin, ear and stomach issues related to underlying allergies and intolerances. However, let's not forget that pets can be allergic to many environmental factors like pollen, trees, plants, grasses, mulch, dust, other animals, detergents, and fleas...to name a few. Symptoms of environmental allergies are similar to human allergies and include sneezing, watery eyes, and itching. Pet allergies are not just environmental and can be derived from food intolerances as well.

Allergies, especially food related, can contribute to inflammation in the body. This inflammation presents itself in our pets as itchiness, flaking skin, chewing at irritated areas, redness of the skin, hair loss, ear infections, anal gland sensitivities, and drooling or smacking of the lips from nausea. The most common areas known to display food allergies are feet and ears, though symptoms are never limited to just these locations. Underneath the surface of a pet allergy is the long-term effect of inflammation on your pet's body. This can include liver disease, joint problems, and dental disease. Getting allergies under control is not just about your pet's appearance, but also about their overall health.

Help! How to Figure It Out

So you have an idea that your pet may have an allergy, what's next? Call your Veterinarian! We can work together to figure out what is going on. The first steps taken in pursuing allergies usually involve diet trials. A careful food history is taken, and a prepared or homemade diet is selected based upon this history. There are 2 common options for allergy testing. In a dermatologist's office, skin testing is performed by injecting tiny amounts of allergens into the skin and the response is measured. This is called IDST, or intradermal skin

test. In a primary care office such as a veterinary clinic, allergy testing involves utilizing a sample of blood to test for antigen-induced antibodies that create sensitivity to a variety of ingredients typically found in pet food. Blood tests for food are also available, but dermatologists consider them less reliable than food trials.

If your Veterinarian feels your pet's allergic reaction may be more closely related to a food allergy, they may suggest food trials. Food trials consist of eliminating a variety of foods such as the current protein and carbohydrate sources (especially if grains are present), from your pet's diet to see what foods trigger a reaction. If symptoms improve after removing a particular ingredient, it helps the Veterinarian to determine what diet is best for your pet to eat going forward. Another elimination method may be to put your pet on a bland diet and slowly add in a variety of proteins like chicken, beef, or lamb to see how your pet responds to the new ingredients. Food trials can last up to two months, during which time the variety of foods offered is limited to see if the pet's symptoms improve. Homemade diets are considered ideal for this trial, even if an owner may not be interested in cooking long term. Commercial diets are also available. No diet is the perfect answer for all pets.

Bowman Animal Hospital Administrator Tara Marlowe, understands the benefits of allergy testing. Her 14 year old dog, Pokie, suffered from intense skin allergies for two years before being adopted by Tara. Tara had her tested for allergies and says, "I decided to get her tested and the Veterinarian found that Pokie was highly allergic to chicken. Once we eliminated chicken from her diet, her skin dramatically improved and her ear infections finally went away!"

While antibiotics and steroids may be prescribed to treat initial symptoms until allergens are eliminated, there is a holistic approach to treating pet allergies. A Veterinarian specializing in holistic pet care may recommend a combination of herbs, supplements, and topical treatments to aid in your pet's comfort and healing process.

Learn more

Visit our website at www.bowmananimalhospital.com or call 919-847-6216 to schedule a consultation. *See ad on page 53.*