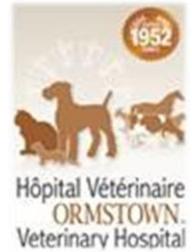


## DOG AND CAT ALLERGIES

There are four different types of allergies that your animal can suffer from :

- An allergy to flea bites
- Atopic dermatitis
- Alimentary allergy
- A contact allergy (very rare)



### Allergy / allergen

An allergy is the body's abnormal reaction to the presence of a substance, generally a protein, that is usually not harmful. An allergen is the substance that is capable of provoking this type of reaction. Allergens are extremely varied in nature and can be found in the environment or the animal's food. Some of these substances include dust mites, proteins in food, feathers, pet hair, and pollen from grass, trees or weeds.



### Clinical signs :

The main sign of an allergy in a domestic animal is itchiness. It is usually the face, chest and paws that are most affected. Dogs usually scratch, lick and nibble at themselves. This can lead to red patches and skin lesions such (sores and scabs). It is also common for an allergic dog to suffer from ear infections. Cats will usually groom themselves excessively. A cat will have a symmetrical loss of hair and a crusty dermatitis or raised red plaques that may ooze somewhat.

Most allergies (especially atopic dermatitis) normally start before four years of age. Alimentary allergies, however, can start at any age.

There are specific signs that can help a veterinarian determine a diagnosis of either an atopic dermatitis or a food allergy. Atopic dermatitis is a hereditary illness. Therefore, the existence of similar symptoms in the animal's parents would be an important clue. Also, some breeds are more predisposed to the disease than others. The animal's symptoms will be seasonal if the cause of the atopic dermatitis is pollen. An animal that has atopic dermatitis can also suffer from conjunctivitis and rhinitis. An alimentary allergy can cause digestive changes such as diarrhea and an increase in daily bowel movements. Despite all the clues, sometimes it is impossible to distinguish between the two illnesses and your veterinarian will have to take them both into consideration.



## Illnesses caused by allergies

Skin allergies almost always result in a fragile equilibrium disturbance of healthy skin. This weakened skin tissue is more susceptible to infections. Two organisms can develop in an anarchic manner and provoke another illness, secondary dermatitis. One of the germs is a bacteria (staphylococcus) and the other is a fungus (Malassezia). They are principally responsible for your animal's suffering. The detection and control of these organisms are fundamental steps in the treatment of such allergies.



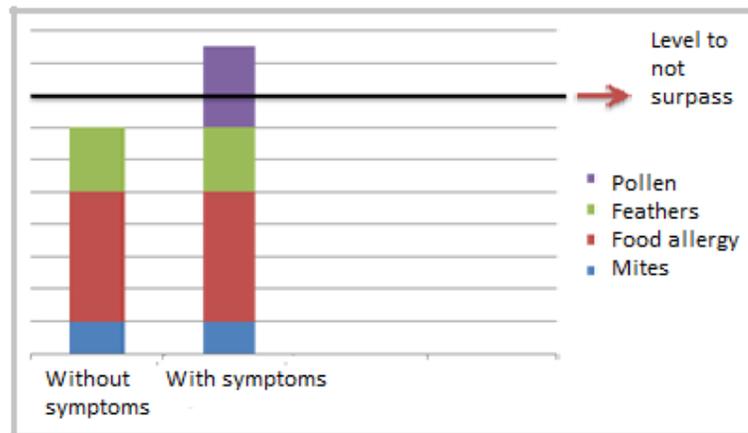
## Multiple diseases

People and animals can have multiple allergies. It is actually very rare to be allergic to only one thing. For example, we can be allergic to several different types of pollen, pollen and dust mites or dust mites and an alimentary protein. The various combinations are endless. Itchiness is the main symptom of any possible combination that your cat or dog may have. For cats and dogs, it is not always necessary to recognize and



treat all of the allergies and their complications at the same time. Sometimes it is sufficient to eliminate only a few of the major causes of pruritus in order for the animal to feel better and live a comfortable life (see chart 1).

Chart 1



## Diagnosis / Treatment

If your veterinarian suspects that your animal is suffering from allergies, you have to proceed by taking one step at a time. The first step would be to confirm that the itchiness is really caused by allergies. We would need to eliminate the possibility of parasitic causes (fleas and other ectoparasites). An antiparasitic treatment might be recommended by your veterinarian even if there is no evidence of parasites on your animal.

The second step would be to recognize and control any secondary infections. If the animal shows any signs indicating that such an infection is present or probably present, your vet will recommend antibiotic or antifungal treatment.

If your animal has seasonal allergies, your veterinarian will normally choose to treat them every time they manifest themselves. It is not necessary to undergo extensive and expensive testing to find the specific cause, because sometimes the results can be inconclusive. If the dog or cat is suffering on a daily basis throughout the year, it is imperative to find the source. Food allergy testing is the most simple, but longest type of allergy testing. There is no sophisticated test that exists for this diagnosis. It is sufficient, according to the recommendations of your veterinarian, to change your animal's diet by feeding it a source of protein that it has never eaten before. The test lasts for a maximum of ten weeks and its success is estimated with regards to the improvement of the animal's symptoms during the course of the diet. In the case of an alimentary allergy, the only treatment would consist of not giving your animal the food which caused the itchiness.



There are two forms of tests available for diagnosing atopic dermatitis. One is a serological blood test and the other is an intradermal skin test. The sole objective of these tests is to determine which allergens are responsible for your animal's symptoms. The intradermal skin testing involves the injection of a small amount of a wide variety of common allergens into the animal's skin. Within minutes, small red bumps will appear when there is a reaction to the allergen. Your animal would begin desensitization therapy which consists of injecting your animal with progressive doses of the allergens that proved to be harmful during the allergy testing. This type of therapy is designed to reprogram your animal's immune system to become less reactive to those allergens. If this form of treatment appears to be effective, your animal would need to continue it for the rest of its life.

In a lot of cases, a multimodal approach (combination of several approaches) is necessary to diminish the microbial colonization, to improve skin condition, to control itchiness, and to proceed with desensitization therapy. Your veterinarian will create a treatment plan that is best suited for you pet and its symptoms.

*Good luck!*

