

## Atopic Dermatitis in dogs

Skin allergies, also known as **Atopic Dermatitis** or **Atopy**, are relatively common in dogs. Good skin care and other medication can control the problem in most dogs but unfortunately there is no cure. Affected dogs may need lifelong treatment.

Atopic dermatitis causes itching, licking or chewing in specific areas of skin:

- Face, chin and neck
- Ears - recurrent ear infections may be the only sign
- Armpits
- Tummy
- Groin
- Between the toes
- Around the bottom

Dogs may suffer from recurrent red skin and infections in these areas.

Atopic dermatitis starts between the ages of **six months to four years**. Any breed of dog can suffer from atopic dermatitis but it's most commonly seen in:

- Terriers
- West Highland White Terriers
- Labradors and Retrievers
- German Shepherd Dogs
- English Bull Terriers
- Boxers
- English or Irish Setters
- Shar Peis
- Staffordshire Bull Terriers

Dogs can become atopic to things such as dust mites, insects, pollen and mould.

### Could it be anything else?

Lots of things can cause dogs to itch. Other problems include:

- Skin infections
- Fleas
- Mites (also called mange or scabies)
- Yeast infections
- Food intolerance

These must be treated first if present. At Hillside, we may take skin samples, to examine under a microscope, hair samples, biopsies or blood tests, or refer you to a skin specialist for intradermal skin testing. This is to check for skin infections, yeast, fungus, mites, fleas and other diseases.

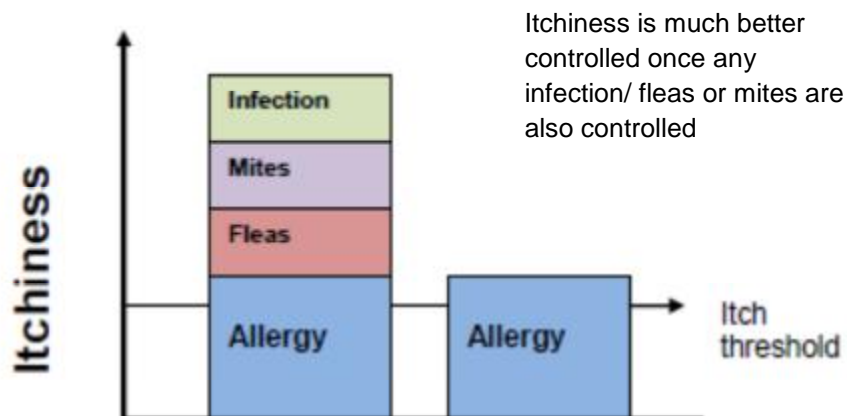
Around one in 20 cases may have food intolerance as the main problem, so food intolerance should be ruled out first by performing a strict diet trial over a 6-8 week period. There could also be a secondary food intolerance alongside atopic disease.

#### Four Facts About Atopic Dermatitis:

1. It requires continuous and lifelong treatment (rather like asthma).
2. Dogs will have flare-ups from time to time; often seasonally.
3. There will be some degree of lifelong expense.
4. No single treatment is perfect. Some are more effective than others, some have unwanted side effects and some are more costly than others. We will work with you to find the solution which best suits you and your pet. This will take time and may require a bit of trial and error.

#### Managing atopic dermatitis

A typical case of atopic dermatitis may require three to five of the treatments described below at the same time.



#### Anti- flea treatment

Even though we will have looked for fleas and mites, it may not always be possible to spot them. One flea bite can trigger an allergic reaction that lasts for weeks and all dogs are prone to picking up fleas. It is therefore essential that all itchy dogs are treated routinely for flea prevention.

The best method is to give **Program** tablets monthly to prevent build-up of flea eggs in the house, and back this up with a good adulticide treatment – at Hillside Vets we recommend **Bravecto** tablets - in the warmer months as well, when fleas are around outside. You must treat all dogs and cats in the same household, using the same treatments - **Program** for cats is available as an injection that lasts for six months, and we recommend **Stronghold** spot on for cats as an adulticides to use at the same time in the warmer months.

#### Antibiotics

Antibiotic tablets, creams and ear drops are essential whenever secondary bacterial skin or ear infections are present. Infections often come back, especially if the underlying allergy is not fully controlled and sometimes long courses of antibiotics are required.

## **Steroids (such as Prednisolone)**

Effective in nearly 100% of cases and inexpensive, they reduce itchiness by decreasing inflammation but they do have serious side effects when used long term. Steroids are especially useful for short-term flare-ups in dogs with a seasonal allergy and in cases where nothing else has helped.

The short term side effects are drinking and urinating more (beware this can sometimes be at night), increased appetite and weight gain and increased panting.

We try to avoid using steroids for long periods because side effects in the long term include liver problems, bladder infections, stomach ulcers and hair loss. Hydrocortisone aceponate spray (**Cortavance**) is a useful steroid spray that is not absorbed internally and therefore has fewer side effects than tablets. It is particularly useful when used in conjunction with immunotherapy.

## **Immunotherapy**

Immunotherapy involves giving a vaccine by injection in gradually increasing doses.

A blood test or intradermal skin test will be undertaken to try to identify what your dog is allergic to. About 50-70% of dogs have a good response to immunotherapy.

At first dogs will need frequent injections for several weeks and then monthly injections for some time (this can often be for life). We can teach you how to inject at home. It can take time to respond to this and so other treatments are often needed in the first 6-8 months. If your dog does not respond within 12 months immunotherapy is unlikely to work.

However combining this therapy with antihistamines improves the success rate. It can also be used to reduce the steroid doses if they are required. If your pet responds to the immunotherapy you should continue it for life. There is now a form of immunotherapy available from skin specialists which involves giving the vaccine regularly under the tongue.

## **Atopica (cyclosporine) and Apoquel (oclacitinib)**

These drugs can be highly effective at controlling allergies by suppressing the immune system and come in tablet form. They do, however, have some side effects which we would discuss with you.

## **Shampoo/ Wipes (Malacetic)**

Routine shampooing is very important when treating atopic dermatitis. Bathing is soothing and can wash away the allergens and restore moisture to the skin. A general shampoo to removal allergens from the coat (mechanical action) every 1-2 weeks can be really helpful.

We recommend shampoos that contain oatmeal or emollients which reduce itch (**Episooth** or **Coatex Aloe** and **Oatmeal**). Anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and degreasing shampoos can also be helpful on an individual basis, as recommended by your vet (**Malaseb**, **Paxcutol**).

## **Essential Fatty Acids (Omevio)**

Good quality omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids in the correct ratio and at high doses can be helpful. They improve the barrier function of the skin. These are usually added to your dog's food.

## **Antihistamines**

These do not work as well in dogs as they do in people, but can be a useful addition to your dog's treatment plan.

## **Prevention**

Allergies are often inherited and dogs that have allergies should not be bred from.

Whilst having a dog with atopic dermatitis is likely to be a life-long problem, with good diagnosis, management and treatment, your dog can live a long, happy and comfortable life.

If you have any concerns regarding your dog's skin, please contact us for an appointment.

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