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How inhalant allergies affect your pet

Laymen call them **allergies** or **hay fever**. Scientist refer to them as Type 1 **hypersensitive** or **atopy**. Whichever term is used, they are the most common cause of skin disease in small animals and, arguably, the most common cause for concern among pet owners.

Atopy occurs in dogs and cats that are hereditarily predisposed to developing antibodies (immunoglobulin E or IgE) to normal environmental proteins. Antibodies, which are normally protective, in this case, have a determined effect. In the allergic patient, IgE antibodies interact with normal environmental proteins called "antigens", including the pollen from plants, trees, grass and weeds as well as house dust, animal dander, fleas and molds. The allergic reaction usually causes the animal to scratch, rub, lick, chew or bite at its skin. Common complications include hot spots, skin infection, hair loss and ear infections. Unlike humans, animals rarely cough, sneeze or suffer asthma due to allergies.

Although allergies cannot be cured, they often can be controlled. One fundamental step in controlling any allergy is to **identify the cause of the allergic reaction, and then avoid it.** However, it may not be easy to avoid the causative agent when the substance is in the air we breathe. Therefore, frequent bathing to remove that substance is the next best option.

The most accepted method of treatment is **hyposensitization.** It is only 60 to 85% successful, depending on your criteria for success. These injections must be given throughout the lifetime of the pet. Unlike humans' allergies, pets' allergies often worsen over time.

Once the allergic reaction has begun, most experts agree that short acting corticosteroids usually are the most effective non-specific, anti inflammatory, anti itch medications. However, corticosteroids have side effects, including increased thirst, urination and appetite as well as decreased immune response. Antihistamines have been ineffective as treatments for canine allergies, with less than a 30% response rate. Omega # and Omega 6 fatty acid supplements have been found to be effective in reducing itching in a significant minority of itching animals.