

Allergies.

As with humans, pets are susceptible to allergies that can cause a range of symptoms. Skin disease is one of the most common skin problems that we have to manage.

The most common allergies that we see are those to ectoparasites (fleas, ticks, lice), food allergens and environmental allergens.

Flea Allergies

In both cats and dogs, fleas remain the most common cause of itchy skin, or pruritis, worldwide. It is thought to be the saliva that is injected into a dog's or cat's skin during the flea's feeding activity that induces the allergic reaction. Reactions occur immediately and also can stimulate a delayed reaction. These reactions often occur together, but 15 to 30% of dogs only suffer from delayed reactions. Sadly, once a dog has become allergic to fleas, they will be allergic for life. In dogs, flea allergy normally causes irritation down their backs, especially at the tail base. To prevent the allergy from occurring in the first place is the key; prevention is far better than cure when it comes to fleas, and is generally more cost effective.



Food Allergies

Adverse food reactions occur in both cats and dogs. In both species, itchy skin can occur as a result of food allergies. Many cats show severe facial itchiness and in dogs, the reaction is very similar to that of flea allergies. In dogs, gastrointestinal signs can also occur, such as colitis or increased frequency of defecation.

With food allergies, symptoms can be delayed for some time and, even if a diet trial is initiated, it can take up to 12 weeks for the problem to resolve. Prescription or home cooked diets will probably be recommended for your pet to ensure that the allergen source has been eliminated. For pets that have been diagnosed with food allergies, it is essential that they receive a hypoallergenic, balanced diet to help manage their condition. Cheaper diets often have variants in their ingredient list and this can change without the owner being aware. Diets with fixed ingredient lists ensure that this does not happen. Treats and extras should also be *inspected* carefully to ensure that their content is suitable.

Environmental Allergies

Dogs and cats can also have a reaction to allergens in the environment. It can present in a similar way to flea and food allergies but can have marked seasonal trends. Allergens may include pollens, house dust mites, moulds, grass and trees. These can be hard to manage and may flare up depending on the season.

It is very possible that an animal could be allergic to one or all of the above allergens. An animal may be able to cope happily with its allergies and show no signs of them until one of the allergens is increased. This can send them into turmoil. Effective management of allergies is essential to ensure that a pet remains healthy and happy. Skin problems can be extremely irritating and painful for the pet. Treatment can be successful but is only ever management of the signs, never cure.

If you suspect that your pet may have an allergy, please contact the surgery for advice on the diagnosis and best care of your pet.