



## TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR PET ALLERGIES (ATOPY)

Allergic reactions to indoor and outdoor allergens are very common in dogs and cats. In many cases when itching, licking, chewing, or ear infections are persistent, and dietary allergy has already been eliminated as a possibility, one of the following treatment options may be necessary.

The relative cost of each option is given in dollar signs and varies depending on the size/weight of the pet:

- (\$) ~ \$10-\$20 for 1 month of treatment
- (\$\$) ~ \$30-\$50 for 1 month of treatment
- (\$\$\$) ~\$50-\$80 for 1 month of treatment

**Cortisone (\$)** therapy (topical or systemic) is usually the fastest acting and most effective way to treat allergic symptoms. *Unfortunately, long-term administration is associated with undesirable side effects.* Side effects that occur, even with short-term use, include increased water consumption, urination and appetite. For occasional short-term use (less than 1-2 months per year), cortisone is a quick, easy, and inexpensive way to control itching in pets.

### *NON-CORTISONE ALTERNATIVES*

1) **Antihistamines (\$)** given orally are another inexpensive way to rapidly control allergic itching in pets. Any single antihistamine may or may not be effective in an individual patient. However, if 2-3 different medications are tried sequentially, there is a 75% chance that one of them will be effective. Antihistamines are safer than cortisone for long-term use; drowsiness or sedation and dry mouth are the most common side effects. The drugs and dosages most commonly used are listed below:

Over the Counter:

Benadryl (diphenhydramine): 1mg per pound of body weight twice daily

Tavist (Clemastine): Less than 20 lbs give ½ small tablet (1.34 mg) twice daily; 20-60 lbs give 1 ½ small tablets twice daily; over 60 lbs give 2 tablets (total of 2.68mg) twice daily

Chlortimeton (Chlorpheniramine): DOGS: 2mg-4mg per 10# of body weight twice daily  
CATS: 2-4mg cat daily

Claritin (Loratidine): 5 mg daily if less than 15 lbs; 10 mg daily (or 5 mg twice daily) if 15-39 lbs; 10 mg twice daily if over 40 lbs

Atarax (Hydroxyzine), Prescription drug available at Valley Vet (dogs: 1 mg/lb daily)



3) **Bathing and topical sprays (\$)** can reduce allergic itching, particularly when there are secondary yeast or bacterial infections, or when the affected areas are more localized. For pets that enjoy baths, cool water and anti-itch shampoos such as *Episoothe* (colloidal oatmeal), *Histacalm* (antihistamine), and *Cortisoothe* (cortisone) can provide welcome temporary relief. Sprays such as *Relief* can be used to treat “hot spots” and other focal itchy areas. However, long term use of sprays can be associated with undesirable side effects and is not usually recommended.

4) **Fish Oil/ Omega -3 Fatty Acid Supplements (\$)** reduce the inflammatory response and are effective in some cases, especially when combined with antihistamines. There is ongoing debate about which formula of fatty acid is most effective; in general the Omega 3 Fatty acids EPA and DHA are thought to be the most helpful. The dosage of fatty acids often used for allergy relief is approximately 180mg EPA and 120 mg DHA for each 10 lbs body weight. We carry *generic Omega 3* supplements as well as *Derm Caps*, which have been proven effective in University studies.

5) **Atopica (Cyclosporine) (\$-\$-\$-\$)** Atopica is effective in about 80% of allergic pets, often reducing itch within the first 1-3 weeks of treatment. It has fewer long-term side effects than cortisone and in some cases can be 1-3 times a week to control itching once remission has been achieved. On the downside, *Atopica* can cause vomiting and loss of appetite at the start of therapy, though these side effects are usually self-limiting and quickly subside. This drug is also quite expensive for larger dogs, though with concurrent administration of a second medication (ketoconazole) the dose and cost can be reduced by ½. There are large differences in the absorption of some of the generic forms of cyclosporine and so these should be discussed with your veterinarian before use.

6) **Allergy shots (desensitization) (\$-\$-\$-\$)** Desensitization vaccinations are the same mode of treatment as “allergy shots” in people. Once a diagnosis has been reached and offending allergens have been identified through blood and/or skin testing, a vaccine is formulated and administered at home on a biweekly to once monthly basis. This treatment has been shown to reduce overall itchiness in about 75% of patients. Because shots may take up to 1 year to achieve a reduction in itch, they are frequently combined with other fast acting treatments to control the pet’s itching over the short term.