



Atopic Dermatitis(skin allergy) T N Carr

How do I know my pet has atopy?

This distressing condition causes itchiness often around the face and muzzle and often the feet and under the arms. Often it affects young dogs and does have a breed linkage with commonly affected breeds being westies, GSDs, EBTs and setters.

Could it be anything else?

The vets will want to check it is not being caused by parasites or skin infections. This may also involve skin scrapings (a small portion of skin is scraped onto a microscope slide for examination), sometimes biopsies and some cases blood is taken for allergy testing.

Can the allergic skin disease be cured?

If the trigger factor can be identified and removed then possibly yes, but usually we would have to say that rather like asthma the disease is managed rather than cured. Management requires commitment from both the owner and the vets as often atopy can be frustrating to treat.

No treatment is likely to be perfect and many animals will have occasional flare ups.

What is allergy testing?

We sometimes recommend taking a small sample of blood and sending this off for allergy testing. This looks for excessive reaction in the blood to the various trigger factors. On occasion in a referral situation intradermal skin prick testing may be warranted.

What treatments are available?

There are many proposed treatments and sometimes cost is an issue as some of the treatments are quite expensive. Being covered by a lifelong insurance policy is of obvious benefit in these cases.

Although not exhaustive here is a list of some of the **treatments** we use:

- **Prednisilone** probably the commonest treatment, and usually very effective but not without side effects which often put us off prescribing them. They should if possible be reserved for cases that fail to respond to other measures or in cases where finance constrains other approaches.
- **Immunotherapy** if following allergy blood tests it is clearly shown immunotherapy may help then this may be organised. It involves a course of induction injections over a few months then a single monthly injection for life. Probably around 30% of dogs respond really well to immunotherapy, 30% respond partially and the remainder show no improvement despite a positive diagnosis.
- **Antihistamines** these are helpful for some dogs but often disappointing.
- **Atopica** this is a new drug and proving highly effective. It is not cheap and can cost upwards of £100.00 per month (more for a big dog). The advantage is the scarcity of side effects.
- **Antibiotics** these can be of help if there is suspicion of a secondary infection and often in cases of mild skin disease it is justified to try a course of antibiotics before extensive allergy testing after a clinical examination.
- **Medicated shampoos** used well and rinsed out properly with towel drying this simple measure will greatly improve most skins. There are many different types to suit skins that are excessively greasy down to skins that are excessively dry. They seem quite expensive but go a long way and have no side effects.

- **Essential fatty acids** here we would include oil of evening primrose and also an excellent new product derived from borage oil. They can greatly improve the feel of the skin and give excellent relief to the animal.

Often the best approach to atopic skin disease is using a combination of some of the above to tailored to suit an individuals requirements.