

ATOPIC DERMATITIS

CLIENT INFORMATION SHEET

What is Atopic Dermatitis?

Atopic dermatitis is a chronic inflammation of the skin caused by an allergic reaction to something in the environment. The allergen (substance that is causing the allergic reaction) is typically pollen or house-dust mites, however potentially dogs and cats that can be allergic to everything – including human skin! In atopic dermatitis inflamed skin is very itchy and the affected dog or cat will be constantly scratching, rubbing or chewing, causing hair loss, redness, sores, scabs and secondary bacterial infection.

How is Atopic Dermatitis diagnosed?

There is no single test that will diagnose atopic dermatitis. The history of your animal's skin problems may suggest it but it can be only confirmed once all the other causes of constant scratching (such as fleas, mites, food allergy, contact allergy etc) have been eliminated. This is why very frequently many tests (skin scrapes, swabs, biopsies or even trial therapies) have to be performed before a definite diagnosis of atopic dermatitis is made.

How can Atopic Dermatitis be treated?

Ideally the treatment should be focused on eliminating the cause, alleviating the symptoms and dealing with secondary problems.

Eliminating the Cause: To find out what your pet is allergic to, an allergy test (intradermal or blood test) can be performed. The test will show what is causing the allergic reaction. Once that is known we can reduce exposure to the allergens (by for example hovering carpets, using house-dust mite sprays) and we can also produce a special 'vaccine' to make your pet react less to the allergens. The 'vaccination' is called Allergen Specific Immunotherapy or Desensitization. It is available as an injection or as nose drops. Success rate for this treatment is 50-80%.

Alleviating the Symptoms: To alleviate symptoms of atopic dermatitis (mainly scratching) many drugs can be used. The 3 main groups are steroids (administered in injections, tablets, creams and sprays), immunosuppressant drug (such as Atopica) and anti-histamines (such as Piriton). In many cases administration of dietary supplements (essential fatty acids, vitamins) and spot-on barrier preparations (such as Allerderm) will improve response to treatment.

Dealing with Secondary Problems: The secondary problems in atopic dermatitis are bacterial, fungal and yeast infection of the skin and/or ears. Antibiotics in tablets, ointments or ear drops, as well as antifungal and antibacterial shampoos can be used.

Treatment of atopic dermatitis is always a long term (sometimes lifelong) treatment and it is essential that it is not discontinued once an improvement is seen.