

Itchy Dogs and Cats

There is nothing worse than watching your dog or cat constantly scratching, scooting, chewing or licking themselves. You can give them relief.

People get hay fever and our pets get skin itching. Some dogs lick their feet, scratch their sides, rub their belly on the ground or scoot their bottom, all in an attempt to relieve the constant itching.

Cats will often scratch around their neck or forehead and create sores and scabs.

These responses are abnormal and susceptible pets are likely to have this as a life long issue.

All these problems are often due to skin allergies, with pollens from grasses and other plants being a common cause. Other causes may be allergies to insects, including fleas, household dust mites, and occasionally food proteins.

Once the skin is inflamed is it damaged further by the scratching or licking, and secondary yeast or bacterial infections then make the whole problem worse.

Ideally, with an allergy, the best approach is to avoid what you are allergic to, however this is often impractical with airborne pollens. It is known that dry skin and hot humid conditions makes itching worse, so using a skin moisturiser or giving an itchy pet a cooling bath, can help relieve itchy episodes. There is also strong evidence that increasing the level of certain fish based fatty acids in the skin, makes the skin more resistant to becoming inflamed with allergies. Giving a human fish oil capsule daily to dogs will help improve skin resistance to itching.

If these measures aren't enough, then some pets may respond to human antihistamines, and there are doses that can be recommended for your pet. Unfortunately not many animals respond sufficiently to these treatments.

Another approach with skin allergies is to identify the triggering factors and desensitise the pet with frequent, regular injections of minute amounts of the sensitive compounds. This process can be very effective in some pets, however does involve allergy testing and frequent injections.

Finally, if the triggering factors can't be avoided or identified, then the abnormal immune response that causes the allergy needs to be suppressed. This is usually done using cortisone as injections, tablets, creams or sprays. An alternate product is cyclosporine (Atopica). These treatments aren't without their potential side affects, however with professional guidance most cases of allergic dermatitis can be successfully managed, leaving a relieved pet and a happy owner.