

Veterinary Allergy & Skin Center  
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## ATOPIC DERMATITIS AND IMMUNOTHERAPY

Atopic dermatitis is a very common allergic disease. The allergy can be related to several environmental factors (allergens) such as pollens, trees, grasses, molds, insects, house dust. The most common historical feature is seasonal itching and self-trauma. The disease usually becomes progressively worse and year-round. The major symptoms are itching and scratching, paw licking, face rubbing, recurrent skin or ear infections.

*In order to diagnose atopic dermatitis* and the responsible allergens, a compatible history of symptoms followed by a positive intradermal skin allergy test or serum test is necessary. Some pets may have a negative skin test at the time of testing but a positive reaction 6 or 24 hours later. We will ask you to watch your pet for itching or redness of the skin test site and tell us which area is affected. If the skin test is entirely negative a serum test may be recommended. The serum test is not done initially as it may not be reliable or accurate. Once allergens are identified, two options for allergen specific immunotherapy can be started. This consists of either oral drops (sublingual allergen-specific immunotherapy or *SLIT*) or weekly injections (allergen-specific immunotherapy or *ASIT*). The injections are to be given under the skin and the amount of liquid is very small. If successful, these are given for the life of the pet.

*Side effects of immunotherapy are uncommon* but can include local reaction at the injection or oral site, a temporary increase in itching, and, rarely, anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is very rare but you should watch for personality changes (anxiousness), changes in activity (sedation, hyperactivity), panting, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, collapse or hives over a 90 minute period after administration. If any of these signs are seen you need to call your veterinarian. Side effects are usually mild but should not be ignored. Call us the next business day.

Immunotherapy may require 9-12 months to show improvement. **It is important that you do not discontinue therapy after a short period of time.** Success can vary from 70 to 80% and even if there may not be a complete resolution of itching, it can significantly improve the quality of life of your pet. This is the only therapy that has a chance to cure your pet. Apoquel, Atopica, or steroids will not cure your pet of their allergies and should not be used in juveniles, dogs with demodex, or cancer.

*In addition to immunotherapy*, frequent bathing and moisturizing are important to decrease allergen absorption into your pet's skin as well as to normalize the skin's barrier function. Keep your pet off mattresses and other furniture if they are house dust mite allergic. Increase frequency of flea preventatives and continue to eradicate all fleas in the environment(s) to which your pet is exposed (even if you never, ever see a flea). Novel protein prescription diets or use of a high quality pet food with appropriate fatty acids can help restore the skin's natural barrier to allergens. Other medications can be added in an attempt to control symptoms. These include: antihistamines, fatty acids, topical anti-itch products, antibiotics, anti-yeast medications (to treat and control recurrent skin infections which contribute to itch), pentoxifylline, microemulsified CsA (Atopica) and/or Apoquel. Feel free to ask us about these therapies.