

This Month: Skin Allergies

Skin Allergies

An allergy is generally referred to as an immune system overreaction to a protein that would normally do minimal harm to a body (such as pollen, insect saliva, and certain foods). This is known as a hypersensitivity to a protein. These substances cause scratching, chewing, licking (especially at the feet), face rubbing, hair loss, lacerations, and many other side effects in animals instead of sneezing, watery eyes and runny noses like they do in people.

A dog with an allergy will scratch frequently, might focus on one spot, stop eating or playing just to scratch, or keep the owner up at night with non-stop scratching, chewing or licking. Lesions often begin to appear, especially around the face, feet, and near the base of the tail. These lesions can then become a breeding ground for bacteria, creating an odor and “greasy” feel to the skin. Cats may be seen scratching, but often they are too shy to scratch in front of their owners. They may instead have small scabs and bumps all over their neck, head, and shoulders, called “miliary dermatitis”.

Diagnosis of skin allergies can be difficult, but treatment is usually as simple as avoiding whatever causes those allergies. Prednisone is often prescribed to help relieve itching and inflammation, and a home remedy of 1mg of Benadryl per pound of dog up to three times daily can be used to help.

Signs of Allergies:

- Incessant scratching/chewing/licking
- Red and swollen skin
- Hair loss
- Bacterial infections (odor)

Types of Allergies:

- Flea/Parasite
- Food
- Inhalant/Environment

Some animals have more than one type of hypersensitivity. In fact, many animals might not react to one allergen, but when a second allergen is present, the antigen load will overcome a “threshold” and the dog will begin scratching. This is the case when a mild food allergy does not show symptoms until the pollen or flea season starts and both of the antigen loads summate causing the symptoms of an allergy to appear.

Certain breeds of dogs are also more susceptible to skin allergies; these include Terriers, Labradors, Golden Retrievers, German Shepherds, Schnauzers, Cocker Spaniels and Poodles. Symptoms generally start between the ages of six months and seven years. Very rarely will an animal under six months show symptoms, and if an allergy hasn't developed by eight years of age the scratching is usually caused by something else.

Flea Allergies

The number one most common cause of severe itching in dogs and cats is flea hypersensitivity. When a flea bites an animal, its saliva is transmitted into the animal much like a mosquito. All animals get itchy from fleas, but animals who are hypersensitive to the flea saliva will start itching severely with only a few bites. All breeds can be hypersensitive to fleas, but this sensitivity will only occur through repeated exposure to fleas.

Fortunately, it is very easy to avoid this allergen; the year-round use of a topical flea preventative such as Frontline or Revolution will kill any flea that jumps on your pet, as well as any eggs that might be laid.

For more information about fleas, please see our April Newsletter at www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm

Food Allergies

The second most common cause of skin allergies in dogs and cats is food. Many well balanced diets contain dyes and preservatives that can cause skin allergies, and even those that don't could contain products such as corn, soy and wheat as their main ingredients. Although food allergies are much more common in dogs than in cats, they have been diagnosed in both species.

Starting puppies on a healthy diet (like EaglePack brand foods) that has no dyes or preservatives, as well as a main ingredient of meat rather than wheat or corn, can help to prevent the onset of food hypersensitivity. Avoiding all treats, biscuits and rawhides will also help. If you suspect that your dog may have food allergies, take away all treats, including table scraps, milk bones, rawhides, and chew bones (with the exception of unflavored nylabones), and start them on a diet that consists of a type of meat and carbohydrate they have not been exposed to frequently (most commercial dogs foods are made with beef, pork, or chicken as the main meat ingredient and corn or wheat as a carbohydrate, and most commercial cat foods are made with fish as the main meat ingredient). Even one indiscretion by one person can set off symptoms, so monitor what foods your pet is ingesting very carefully. Carrots or red potatoes, cooked in bulk and frozen until needed are a great way of giving your dog a healthy treat!

Inhalant/Environment Allergies

Inhalant or environmental allergies, more often referred to as atopy, is another significant cause of severe itching in dogs. This is an umbrella term that covers nearly all allergic reactions that do not fall under either of the previous categories. It includes hypersensitivity to pollen, dust, fibers, medications, and anything else that can either be inhaled or transmitted from the environment through the skin. Atopy can be either seasonal or perennial, and unfortunately can be hard to treat depending on what hypersensitivities the animal possesses. A skin test, much like those performed on

humans, can give us an idea exactly what the animal is allergic to and custom vaccines can then be administered to keep your pet symptom-free.

For more information about skin testing, please see our website at
<http://www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/medical.htm#allergy>

Success Story: Jetty!

Jetty was a loggerhead sea turtle caught in the entrance to the Charleston harbor in the middle of May. He was lethargic, emaciated, and had a high barnacle load when captured, and so was taken to the SC Aquarium for rehabilitation. Diagnosed with "DTS" (debilitated turtle syndrome), Jetty made a speedy recovery under the watchful eyes of Doctor Sheridan and the Aquarium staff. Jetty was released with a satellite tracker in August, and you can interactively track his progress yourself at the following website: http://www.seaturtle.org/tracking/index.shtml?tag_id=58944 (you must accept the terms of the website to view)

Dates, Upcoming News, Specials:

The FRAH currently has kittens for adoption! Call or stop by the clinic for more information.

New special: buy 10 doses of Revolution and get two free! That is a year's worth of heartworm and flea protection for a ten-month price!

Can't get rid of those pesky fleas? Try Capstar! An easy-to-administer pill that works for 24 hours to kill all the adult fleas that bite your pet. When used in combination with Frontline or Revolution, it can help you get the head-start you need to control the fleas.

The FRAH Newsletter is now on the web!
www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm

Kittens!

The Folly Road Animal Hospital has kittens available for adoption! All kittens come spayed/neutered, with their first set of shots, and dewormed. Stop by to see these little cuties if interested, but hurry, there is only one kitten left!