

ALLERGIES AND OUR PETS

Just as we can suffer from allergies, so can animals. It can be a seasonal allergy to tree and flower pollens. In such cases, symptoms are often temporary and disappear at the same time as the relevant pollen. There are also food allergies, most often to proteins found in beef, chicken or fish but sometimes to food additives. There are also allergies to the various allergens present in the environment such as dust, dust mites, wool ... and contact allergies.

The principal symptoms of allergies are serious skin itches, hives, recurring ear infections and chronic conjunctivitis. Itching can cause the animal to scratch and chew itself to the point of self-inflicting lesions which can become infected. At this point, a secondary pyodermatitis sets in.

In order to diagnose an allergy, it is often necessary to eliminate other possible causes of itching and to treat secondary infections with antibiotics for periods of up to three weeks. Differential diagnoses include primary pyodermatitis (skin infections), parasitosis (fleas, mites...) and ringworm. To determine the cause of the problem, the veterinarian can order various tests such as skin scratching (parasites), fur cultures (ringworm) or skin cytology (infection). Once these causes have been eliminated, it remains to determine if it is a food or another type of allergy. If the allergy is of short duration, an oral or local cortisone-based treatment and/or an antihistamine could be prescribed. If the allergy lasts an entire year, the veterinarian will recommend a 10-week home hypoallergenic diet rather than a commercial type. If the animal's symptoms persist during this time period, it will be because it is not allergic to food. If however the animal stops scratching while on this new diet, it is probable that it is indeed allergic. To confirm this more

precisely, the next step is to change the diet by once again giving your animal his previous food. If it starts scratching again, it's because it is allergic and it will have to remain on a special diet for the rest of its life. It is sometimes necessary to try several kinds of hypoallergenic foods before finding the right one. For allergies caused by allergens in the air (pollens, dust...), it is possible to do intradermal skin tests to determine the allergens to which the animal reacts. Once these allergens have been identified, we can then proceed to desensitization injections which will have to be given every two or three months for the rest of the animal's life.

If your animal seems uncomfortable and scratches a lot, it may be allergic. Rest assured that it is possible to relieve its discomfort. Do not hesitate to contact your veterinarian if you have any doubts or questions.