



### **Amy J. Randall, DVM, MS, Diplomate, ACVD**

After receiving her doctorate of veterinary medicine from NC State University, Dr. Amy Randall practiced general veterinary medicine for a year in Fredricksburg, VA. She then

completed a two-year internship in veterinary medicine and surgery at Mississippi State University. Dr. Randall performed her residency at The Ohio State University and earned a masters degree. She is board-certified by the American College of Veterinary Dermatology. Dr. Randall has a practice in Portland, Oregon called Animal Allergy and Ear Clinic and currently travels to North Carolina to see patients one week out of the month. She is currently seeing patients out of Happy Tails Emergency Veterinary Clinic in Greensboro.

## **Why Does My Dog or Cat Lick, Chew, Scratch or Pull Hair Out???** **Could It Be Allergies?**

Many people don't realize that allergies are just as common in pets as they are in humans, and can cause dogs and cats quite a bit of suffering. Pet owners are also often surprised to learn that atopic dermatitis in pets is frequently caused by airborne allergens even though the symptoms show up on the skin instead of sneezing and eye discharge as seen in people with grass and tree allergies.

### **What is Atopic Dermatitis?**

The basic definition of this common skin problem is a predisposition to develop allergic symptoms following exposure to substances that are usually harmless, but have triggered an allergic response. Three of the most common offenders are house dust mites, pollen and mold spores which are incredibly difficult for pets to avoid, since house dust mites and mold spores are virtually everywhere and pollen permeates the air outdoors.

The most common symptoms of canine and feline atopic dermatitis include itching, excessive scratching, rubbing on the carpet, hair loss, greasy or flaky skin with a foul odor, excessive chewing on the paws and areas such as the groin and armpits. Over time, the skin that is scratched can develop hot spots - raw, inflamed areas - that may become infected. Unfortunately, once pets develop allergies they usually suffer more and more each year because their skin becomes more sensitive over time. What may start out only in the spring and fall can become a year-round problem as your pet ages and the skin becomes increasingly sensitive.

### **Treatment Options**

There are a plethora of products and medications available to help and provide relief for your pet. Anti-inflammatory drugs, both topical and oral including corticosteroids (prednisone) and antihistamines, can help if the symptoms are short term and not severe. Other options include medicated shampoos or omega 3 fatty acid therapy. In severe cases where the dog's skin is infected, antibiotics or anti-yeast medications may be needed to clear up the skin and reduce some of the symptoms. However, these products and medications treat only the **symptoms** and **not** the **underlying allergies**.

In addition to those mentioned above, there are other medications which fall under the category immunosuppressive. Both of these medications gain control of the allergy symptoms by suppressing the immune system and preventing it from responding. If you want to

keep the symptoms from returning you need to keep your pet on the medication. Once you stop the medication the symptoms return. You may know them by the name brand Atopica or Apoquel or by the drug name cyclosporine or oclacitinib, respectively. These medications can have many side effects such as lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, decreased or lack of appetite, skin irritation or infection and ear irritation or infection. Both medications may increase the susceptibility to infection, demodicosis (hair follicle mite) and may exacerbate cancer conditions.

### **Treatment Option - No Drugs, Less Side Effects - Immunotherapy** **"Allergy shots" and Allergy Testing**

Allergy testing, followed by immunotherapy is proven to be one of the safest, most effective treatments for environmental allergies. Allergy testing can be done on cats, dogs and horses. It allows the dermatologist to identify which trees, weeds, grasses, molds and household items are causing the skin problems. Testing can be done by either intradermal testing (skin testing) or by blood testing. Most veterinary dermatologists prefer performing the traditional allergy test which is called intradermal testing. This is considered the gold standard for testing. It consists of injecting a tiny amount of allergen into the skin and then watching for a small reaction. If the area turns red and becomes raised it indicates a positive reaction to that allergen. In my practice we perform allergy tests for specific grasses, trees and weeds which correlate to the allergens within that geographical region.

The next step is formulating the allergy serum which is not an easy task. This can be the most complex part of immunotherapy (allergy serum). Because the success of the immunotherapy (allergy serum) depends largely on the formulation, Board Certified Dermatologists draw on their years of experience and expertise to create a serum that will best suit the pet and his or her environment.

The allergy serum is then used to desensitize the pet to the offending allergens. The principle behind desensitization is that the serum will "reprogram" the pet's immune system and lessen its hypersensitivity, thus reducing or eliminating the clinical signs of atopic dermatitis. It should provide the pet with relief. There should be constant follow up to make sure the allergy serum is continuing to provide your pet with relief throughout all the seasons. It is not unusual for our clinic to adjust the formula, dose or frequency of the allergy serum based on time of year and client observations.

### **Oral Immunotherapy (Sublingual Drops) - No More Injections!!**

It is now no longer necessary to give allergy serum injections. Oral immunotherapy has been proven to be just as efficacious as injections. It is much easier to administer for the owners and more readily accepted by the pet. Oral immunotherapy serum is dispensed out of a pump, right into the pet's mouth. The allergy serum is absorbed through the mucous membrane, so it is not necessary that your pet ingest it. Typically, serum is given every day and sometimes twice daily. Doses are often just one or two pumps. When given at this frequency, we sometimes see improvement quickly.

At our clinic we have had extremely good results with our oral formulations. We have seen our patients get relief from their symptoms within the first few months of treatment. We are even seeing some patients who have failed injectable immunotherapy, however, these same patients have had success with the oral form.

If you would like more information or have questions about allergies, please call us at Animal Allergy and Ear Clinic at 503-574-4150. We can provide help and answer any questions you may have. I work out of Happy Tails Emergency Clinic in Greensboro one week of each month, however, you can call my office at any time.

**See ad for Animal Allergy and Ear Clinic on page 4.**