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Dr. Andress is the co-owner of Gate City Animal Hospital in Greensboro, which was established in 1997. He received his B.S. in Microbiology from Clemson University, then went on to obtain his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Georgia. His work has been published in several veterinary medicine journals and Dr. Andress has spoken at local and national veterinary conferences. His special interests are in surgery and internal medicine.

Encouraging New **ALLERGY RELIEF**

A newly approved treatment has promised to change how we treat canine allergies. Cytopoint is an injectable medication that is given to dogs every four to eight weeks for allergy control. One of the most common reasons that people seek veterinary care is to help alleviate their dog's suffering from skin allergies. These dogs are incredibly itchy. They will lick their paws, scratch their ears and sides; leading to hair loss, red and inflamed skin, and painful sores. These patients can really be uncomfortable.

Allergies are caused by the immune system's overreaction to substances that would have limited effect on a normal dog. These substances include food, flea bites, pollens, and molds. To simplify things, allergies in dogs can be divided into food allergies, flea bite allergies and atopy or environmental allergies. It is important to partner with your veterinarian to help determine which of these conditions are affecting your dog. It is also critical to make sure that there is not an underlying bacterial, yeast, mange or even ringworm infection. If a food allergy is suspected, a food trial is begun by giving your dog food with ingredients that he or she has never had before. There can be drawbacks to just switching dog foods, so make sure to talk to your veterinarian. If fleas are contributing to allergies, a flea control program is started. Actually, all dogs should be on flea control. Up to forty percent of all dogs are sensitive to flea bites. There have been recent advances in flea medications that make flea control much easier.

Atopic dermatitis is a condition in which the skin is itchy and inflamed due to exposure to small environmental particles, called

allergens. These allergens include plant pollens, molds and even house dust mites. Allergens trigger an inappropriate immune response in some dogs starting a cascade of events that result in compounds being released that cause intense itchiness at the skin level. Atopic dermatitis is a major cause of skin allergies in dogs. It can be seasonal or year round.

We are generally unable to remove these allergens from our pet's environment. The treatment of atopic dermatitis centers on controlling the body's immune system. Prednisone (cortisone) has been the mainstay of treatment for decades. This can be acceptable for a short allergy flare up. Unfortunately, this medication does have side effects which can be life altering if it is used for long periods of time. Atopica and the more recently approved Apoquel are similar to prednisone in that they block part of the immune system's inflammatory pathway. These medications are considered safer than long term prednisone use for treatment of allergies. There are some mild to moderate side effects that are possible. Both of these drugs have been very helpful in controlling symptoms in dogs that suffer from skin allergies. Skin allergy testing is also available for dogs. After the results are obtained, a vaccine is formulated which is usually administered by mouth. It may take months to see a response, but the vaccine makes the body less reactive to these allergens. This can be an effective tool in managing allergies.

Cytopoint is an injectable antibody that targets one of the itch producing compounds in dogs. It is able to bind this itch compound, making it inactive so that the itch cycle is stopped. Recent data suggests that most dogs will respond favorably with limited side effects. Since this medication targets only a very specific part of the "itch" pathway, there is minimal impact on normal immune function. Cytopoint is unique in that there is no longer a need to give daily pills by mouth. This is an injection given in your veterinarian's office. Veterinarians are impressed by the product's low chance of side effects. Long term studies of Cytopoint are ongoing, but currently its future appears bright.

Skin allergies are extremely common in dogs. Patients that have these symptoms are uncomfortable and need help. It is important to team up with your veterinarian to determine the best treatment for your dog. It is exciting that this new product may become a major player in controlling skin allergies in dogs.



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