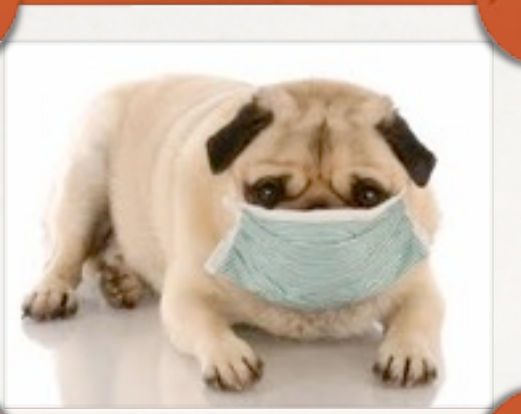


CRITTER KEEPER

Willamette Valley Animal Hospital



APRIL 2011
ISSUE 20

Super Savings

Microchip Monday

Permanent, un-lose-able ID. Inserted and registered for just \$15 all day!

Toenail Tuesday

Stop that annoying clicking across the kitchen! Nail trims for cats are just \$7, only \$8 for dogs!

Wonderful Wednesday

See a vet for anything! Pay just \$15.75 for the exam all day!

TGI Thursday

Super discounts on vaccines for your pets from 1 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. every week! Rabies vaccine only \$6!

Fabulous Friday

Anal gland expressions only \$10! Feline Leukemia and FIV (feline aids) test just \$30!

Savvy Saturday

Need an exam today? We can do that! Need flea products today? We can do that, too. Get both and SAVE \$5!

Super Savings Sunday

Get TGI Thursday and Toenail Tuesday prices today from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.!!

The Truth About:

Pet Allergies

Your cat grooming her hair off? Your dog licking his paws raw? It might be allergies, one of the most common health problems for pets. Just like people, animals have allergic reactions because their immune system overreacts to something. Almost anything - pollen, dust, an ingredient in pet food, an insect bite - can set off an alarm in the immune system, causing it to pump out large amounts of white blood cells, hormones and other material called histamines into the bloodstream.

The result for animals can be a range of different effects, including itchy, swollen skin (known as pruritis); difficulty breathing; or a disruption of the

digestive tract, such as vomiting or diarrhea. These symptoms are Fluffy's version of her human's sneezing, runny nose and watery eyes.

Pets with these kinds of allergic symptoms can be pretty miserable creatures, and unfortunately they can't be cured. Allergies are lifelong, chronic problems. The good news is that there's a lot you can do to help your furry kids feel better. The best way to start is to find out what your pet is allergic to so that you can keep the allergen out of his environment. Animal allergies generally fall under one of four main categories.

Contact Allergies

These are the least common type of allergy in animals. They happen when an animal's skin

comes in contact with the material to which he's allergic - if he rubs his face against a wool blanket, for example, and he's allergic to wool. The chemicals in flea collars can cause this problem as well. The skin at the point of contact will be irritated; it may itch, become thickened or discolored, have a strong odor, and/or lose hair due to constant biting or scratching.

Contact allergies are generally not a hard problem to solve; they're usually confined to a specific area of an animal's body, and the allergen shouldn't take too much work to discover. You can try removing different materials that your pet touches until you find the one that irritates his skin.

Food Allergies

Diet can be a complicated factor in pet allergies. Most animals are not born with allergies to food; they develop over time in response to some part of their diet, often one of the animal proteins. A food allergy can present in many different ways, including the itching, digestive disorders and respiratory distress already mentioned. They can, however, be a real challenge to solve.

You can try to figure out what's causing your pet's allergic reaction by feeding him different diets, but the allergic effects of food can stay in the system for 8 weeks. You may have to keep Fluffy on a hypoallergenic diet for 8 to 12



weeks to see how he reacts, and you may have to do it several times with several different diets before you find one that doesn't cause an allergic reaction.

And while you're feeding these test diets, you'll have to make very sure that your pet doesn't eat any treats, vitamins, leftovers, scraps or even plants around the house. He must eat the test diet exclusively for the entire 8 to 12 weeks to determine whether he has an allergic reaction to it.

Inhalant Allergies

Inhalant allergies are the kind we humans are most used to. Just like us, our pets get hay fever, meaning they can be allergic to the pollen and mold that fill the outside air during the spring and fall. They can also be allergic to the dust mites, mildew and mold that can be inside every home. These kinds of allergens usually produce severe itching in pets, which is usually concentrated in the ears, feet, groin and armpits, although it can be spread across the entire body. Dogs in particular may develop hairless, irritated "hot spots" from constantly chewing on and scratching the affected skin.

Most animals that are allergic to airborne particles are usually allergic to more than one. Often, they will only experience itching during the pollen-heavy seasons of the year, just like humans who have hay fever. If you find

that your pet's allergies seem to be seasonal, you may be able to limit his outdoor time during allergy season. Your pet may be reacting to an indoor allergen, however, or an allergen that doesn't vary by season. In that case, there's not much you can do to keep him away from whatever he's allergic to, although an air filter might provide some relief.

Flea Allergies

This is an extremely common problem for pets and is possibly the most common allergy of all. Animals aren't actually allergic to the fleas themselves but to proteins that fleas secrete in their saliva when they bite. Your pet doesn't have to be a walking flea circus to suffer from an allergy, either. Affected animals can itch severely from a single bite for more than 5 days! So, if you suspect that your pet is allergic to fleas, you're going to have to work very hard to keep the little pests away.



Frequent baths are a good idea, as are the prescription flea applications and pills. Consult your veterinarian when you choose a flea repellent for your pet, though; the wrong kind or too strong of a concentration could cause irritated skin, seizures and even death in extreme cases. You will also want to treat your pet's environment, including any bedding or carpeting with which he comes in contact.

Other Options

What makes allergies hard to deal with is that, in many cases, you either won't be able to determine exactly what is causing the reaction or you won't be able to remove it from the environment. This is where your veterinarian comes into the picture. You and your veterinarian will probably have to work together to determine the best treatments for your pet's allergy. You may have to go through a series of trying a possible solution, waiting to see how your pet reacts to it, and moving on to another solution. Your veterinarian may suggest one or more of the following tests or treatments:

Testing — Your veterinarian has a few different tools to help determine the source of your pet's allergy. The most popular is a blood test that your veterinarian can use to analyze the amount of certain chemicals that the immune system releases into the bloodstream when it is exposed to different allergens. These tests can be used to tell whether your pet is having an allergic reaction or whether the problem is caused by something else, and sometimes they can determine the source of the allergy.

Steroids — These drugs work to suppress the immune system and make the allergic reaction less severe. Steroid treatment can help your pet even if you can't determine what he's allergic to or how he's being exposed. Steroids can have several side effects, however, and they affect nearly every organ in the body.

Steroid use can cause weight gain, increased thirst and urination, increased aggression and other behavioral changes. Steroids are generally used if the allergy occurs for a short amount of time, because long-term use makes animals more susceptible to infection, diabetes and seizures.

Immunotherapy — This is one of the safest and most effective ways to treat allergies, but it also takes the longest amount of time to work, and only about 2/3 of animals respond well to this treatment. Animals are given regular (often weekly) injections that contain small amounts of the substance to which they are allergic, just like people who go in for allergy shots. It gradually desensitizes the immune system to the allergen, meaning that, over time, the immune system is reprogrammed and doesn't react to the allergen as strongly. Unfortunately, it takes some time for the immune system to re-adjust. It can sometimes take 6 to 12 months before animals show any improvement.

Antihistamines — These drugs, much like the allergy medication that people take, work to block the chemicals, called histamines, that are released by the immune system. They are sometimes effective at reducing itching and inflammation, and they are relatively safe to use. Just like in people, individual pets may respond better to some antihistamines than others. Besides their variable effectiveness, the major

drawback of antihistamines is that they cause sedation and can make pets extremely drowsy and sluggish. Occasionally, they can change an animal's energy level enough to affect quality of life.

Symptomatic treatment —

Even if none of the above treatments are effective, you can still give your pet a lot of relief by simply treating his symptoms as they come up. There are a number of soothing shampoos on the market that contain ingredients like oatmeal or Epsom salts. Your veterinarian may also be able to suggest ointments, ear treatments or sprays that can make your pet more comfortable. Be cautious about using home remedies or herbal treatments on your pet, however. Consult with your veterinarian before you try any new treatment, because you could damage your pet's skin or aggravate the allergy. Most of all, remember that, while you can give these symptomatic treatments often, they will only provide temporary relief. If your pet still seems uncomfortable despite the baths or other treatments, you can talk to your veterinarian about long-term treatment.

Whatever treatment decision you and your veterinarian come to, rest assured that the patience and determination it can take to treat allergies is well worth it. Although it may take some time and effort, you can help your itchy, grouchy pet feel comfortable again, unless it's not allergies...

**The Truth About Skin Issues
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-WVAH-



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