



# Atopy and Contact Allergies

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## General Information

Just as allergies plague many people, they also affect our pets. Some allergies like dust allergies, food allergies, and flea allergies are a problem throughout the year. Other allergies to things such as pollens and molds follow a seasonal pattern and are only present for only part of the year when certain plants are pollinating or for more extended times throughout the warm months. August is the height of “pet allergy season” as the allergic response has been building all through the summer and the heat of August adds to the discomfort and the itchiness of seasonal allergies and the flea population is high at this time. Below you will find information on atopy (inhaled allergens) and contact allergies in your pet, the signs that indicate an allergic reaction, and some practical ways for minimizing the severity of your pet’s allergic condition. Information is also available on flea allergies and food allergies. If treating the atopy and/or contact allergy helps but not completely, ask for information on these other topics. Many pets suffer from multiple types of allergies at the same time.

## Atopy (Inhaled Allergen Allergies)

### Causes

Dogs and cats can be allergic to almost all of the same allergens as people (except for pet dander). Dust, mold, and pollen, are the most common allergens in this region. Atopic allergies occur when your pet inhales the specific allergen(s) responsible for his/her allergies. Atopy may be seasonal or non-seasonal and usually involves multiple allergens.

### Signs

- Itchy Skin
- Incessant Licking/Chewing at Feet (Itchy Feet)
- Secondary Skin Infections (which may cause the following)
  - hair loss
  - crusty, scaly, or flaky skin lesions
  - reddened skin with raised welts
  - hyperpigmented (darkened) areas of skin
- Recurrent Ear Infections
  - Reddened, itchy ears
  - Increased wax or discharge from ears
  - Odor associated with ears
- Asthma (common sign in cats)—*Signs of asthma will vary with severity*
  - Wheezing
  - Rapid, Shallow Breathing
  - Coughing
  - Difficulty Breathing, Open Mouth Breathing, Blue Tongue/Gums
- Nasal Discharge/Excessive Tearing
- Sneezing/ Reverse Sneezing (this sounds like a cross between a sneeze and a snort)
- Hives or Welts
- Facial Swelling, Particularly around the eyes and muzzle

## Diagnosis

Clinical signs, a consistent history, and response to therapy will allow our doctors to make the diagnosis of an allergic condition. Skin Scrapes may be used to rule out mites. Skin and ear cytologies may be used to diagnose secondary infections. After an allergic diagnosis is made, allergy testing can be performed if you would like to know which specific allergens are causing your pet's problems.

Allergy testing is the only way to definitively determine which allergen(s) your pet is reacting to. There are a number of variables that determine when and how allergy testing is recommended. If you are interested in allergy testing, talk to one of the doctors at Clermont Animal Hospital. Skin allergy testing requires a referral to a veterinary dermatologist. Blood testing for allergens is available through Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc. If scheduling allergy testing, it is very important to inform the veterinarian about all medications and treatments you are using for your pet and closely follow all recommendations. Certain medications such as steroids (available in many forms and many types of medications) can invalidate the results of these sensitive tests.

## Treatment

It is important to get all secondary infections under control using proper antibiotics/antifungals and proper monitoring as recommended by your veterinarian. Many animals are more bothered by the secondary infection than by the primary allergy. The allergy can be treated using one or more of the medications below. Our Doctors will be happy to help you choose which remedies are best for your pet.

- Allergy Shots
  - This is the only treatment that addresses the primary problem
  - This requires allergy testing to determine which antigens to include.
  - Allergy shots and protocols for their use are custom designed by a veterinary dermatologist to address the specific allergy issues for each individual pet.
- Antihistamines (try multiple types to find one that works for your pet)
  - This class of medication decreases the body's response to the allergen
  - First line of treatment for hives or facial swelling.
  - Benedryl (Diphenhydramine) 1-2 mg per pound; Give up to 3 times/day
  - Chlorpheniramine Maleate 4mg
    - Dogs: ½ - 2 tablets; Give 2-3 times/day
    - Cats ¼ - ½ tablet; Give up to 3 times/day
  - Claritin (Loratidine) 10mg
    - Dogs and Cats <15#: ¼ tablet once daily
    - Dogs 15-30#: ½ tablet once daily
    - Dogs 30-70# 1 tablet once daily
    - Dogs > 70# 2 tablets once daily
  - Other types of antihistamines are available by prescription
  - A 14-day trial is adequate for evaluating the effectiveness of an antihistamine
- Omega-3-Fatty Acids
  - This supplement makes skin more supple and more resistant to inflammation
  - Commercial Supplement Available through Clermont Animal Hospital
  - Major Component of Fish Oil Capsules
  - This works synergistically with antihistamines and aspirin
- Buffered Aspirin—**DOGS ONLY!!! ALWAYS GIVE WITH FOOD!**
  - This can decrease the discomfort and inflammation of an allergic reaction
  - Aspirin should be used sparingly on only the worst days and never more than three days per week.
  - DO NOT substitute ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or any other medication

- Discontinue use if signs of upset stomach, decreased appetite, vomiting, or diarrhea develop.
- Do not use if your dog is on prescription medications for arthritis, steroids, or blood thinners.
- Use the dosing chart below to properly treat your dog:
  - 5-15 pounds                      1 baby aspirin twice a day
  - 15-30 pounds                    ½ adult aspirin OR 2 baby aspirin twice a day
  - 30-50 pounds                    ¾ adult aspirin OR 3 baby aspirin twice a day
  - More than 50 pounds        1 adult aspirin twice a day
- Oatmeal Shampoo
  - Soothes skin and decreases itchiness—Provides temporary relief
  - Removes allergens from hair coat to decrease exposure time
  - Be sure shampoo does not contain any detergents—these can remove the oils that naturally protect your pet’s skin from irritation.
  - Episoothe® Shampoo and Conditioner are oatmeal-based products available through Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.
- Genesis Spray® (Available through Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.)
  - This is a topical steroid spray. It is the animal equivalent to cortisone cream.
  - This product cannot be used for a short time immediately prior to allergy testing.
- Steroids (injectable or oral)—only used in moderate to severe cases due to side effects
  - Decreases the body’s allergic response by suppressing inflammation.
  - Long-acting, short-acting, and oral forms are available
  - By prescription only
  - Side effects include increased drinking, increased urination, increased appetite, weight gain, immune suppression (increased risk of certain infections), and increased risk of certain diseases.
  - All steroids must be discontinued before allergy testing as directed by the veterinarian.
- Bronchodilators
  - This class of drugs is used to treat asthmatic animals
  - Available by prescription only

**Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.**  
 1404 Old State Route 74  
 Batavia, Ohio 45103  
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# Contact Allergies

## Causes

Skin contact with an allergen will cause a contact-type allergic reaction. For this reason, the feet, belly, groin, armpits, and the underside of the neck are the most common sites for contact allergies as these areas are exposed when your pet walks or lies on surfaces containing the allergen. Dust, pollen, grass, chiggers, lawn treatments, and cleaning products are the most common substances to cause contact allergies. Some pets may suffer from both atopy and contact allergies from the same allergen.

## Diagnosis

Same as for Atopy—See Above.

## Signs

- Itchy Skin, particularly on the feet, belly, groin, armpits, and the underside of the neck.
- Red or mottled red appearance to the skin
- Hives
- Incessant Licking at Feet (Itchy Feet)
- Secondary Skin Infections (which may cause the following)
  - hair loss
  - crusty, scaly, or flaky skin lesions
  - reddened skin with raised welts
  - hyperpigmented (darkened) areas of skin
- Hives or Welts
- Facial Swelling, particularly of the muzzle.

## Treatment

Same as for Atopy (except for bronchodilators)—See Above, with the following additions:

- If possible, limit contact with known allergen(s).
- If allergen is a seasonal, outdoor allergen: wipe feet and/or abdomen with a wet wipe or a washcloth after your pet comes in from outdoors to remove the allergen from the hair coat and prevent prolonged contact.
- Use Pyoben Shampoo® or Malacetic Wipes® (available through Clermont Animal Hospital) or Stridex® pads to clean feet once a day or once every other day.
  - Provides deep cleaning to remove allergens
  - Minimizes bacteria and yeast that cause secondary infection
  - May be over-drying if used too frequently

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