

Allergies in Dogs - Part 2

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Treatment of Allergies in Dogs

Unfortunately, allergic disease in dogs is similar to the same condition in man as it can very seldom be cured but just controlled through periodic or continuous use of medication.

Drugs Used:

Hyposensitization (allergy shots) – Generally take from 4-12 months to become effective. They provide excellent control of the pet's allergies in 65% of cases. They help another 15% but are not completely perfect, and provide no appreciable benefits for about 20% of cases.

Cortisone (steroids) – Derivations or modifications of this drug are the most frequently used form of therapy.

- ***Tablets*** – Several modifications of cortisone are available in this form and one may provide relief when another does not. The most desirable regimen of therapy is alternate day treatment utilizing a low dose of a short acting form such as Methylprednisolone.
- ***Injectables*** – These generally provide relief of symptoms for 2-6 weeks. Injectables are not recommended because they cannot be as easily adjusted to fit the pet's needs.

Side effects of cortisone therapy:

Few major side effects will be produced with short or long term low dose therapy utilizing alternate day treatment. Three categories of changes may be noted with moderate and high dose therapy.

- ***First*** – May cause an increased thirst and appetite. This is not harmful but if water intake is increased markedly, the pet, if a house dog, will have to be allowed outside more frequently to urinate.
- ***Second*** – May produce a change in body metabolism whereby body protein is broken down to form a dilute glycogen solution which is stored in the liver. Clinically, breakdown of body protein may lead to a thin or poor hair coat, a decrease in muscle mass (especially the abdominal muscles resulting in the pet having a potbellied appearance), and enlargement of the liver. Although these changes may be disconcerting aesthetically they are seldom responsible for severe illness.
- ***Third*** – May lead to chronic urinary tract infections which may or may not have obvious clinical signs. It is therefore recommended that a urine culture be done every six months.
- ***Fourth*** – May, especially with high dose and long term therapy, produce changes in the pancreas leading to a pancreatitis. This complication is serious and may lead to the pet's demise.

Antihistamines – May be helpful in controlling mild allergies or allow the use of a reduced dose of cortisone. Often one type of antihistamine will work when another will not. Therefore, we routinely dispense three different antihistamines (hydroxyzine, diphenhydramine, and chlorpheniramine) and use each for two weeks to see which work best.

Atopica^R – Is a drug that modifies the immune system and controls allergies in about 65-70% of the cases. It has less side effects than cortisone or steroids with long term use. The most common side effect is vomiting which occurs in 5-10% of the cases. The drug has a lag period and may take 3-6 weeks to be effective. The major disadvantage is cost (\$2.50) per day per 10 lbs. body weight. However, 30 % of the cases can be controlled with every 2nd day treatment and another 15% controlled with every 3rd day treatment.

Antibiotics – Used to control secondary bacterial infection when it is contributing significantly to the dermatitis. To keep the infection under control some animals may have to be treated continuously on two consecutive days per week.