

**Patton Veterinary Hospital  
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## **Your Itchy Pet**

There are many reasons why your pet becomes itchy. The most common reasons are flea allergies, food allergies, atopy (environmental allergies) and mange. It can be a long process in definitively diagnosing the cause of the itchiness. When the diagnosis is made, a well formulated plan can be given to you to alleviate and prevent your pet's clinical signs. Your pet should always be evaluated by a veterinarian when they break out with an itchy episode, but below are some suggestions for treatments you can do at home to make them comfortable in the meantime.

The following suggestions are treatments you can use at home:

- 1) **Food Trial**: Performing a food trial is how veterinarians determine if your pet has a food allergy. The idea is to feed them a new type of meat (duck, venison, kangaroo, etc) and carbohydrate (potato, sweet potato, etc) that they have never been exposed to. The hallmark sign of a successful food trial is a decrease in itchiness and infections. It may take up to 8-10 weeks to achieve this. It is extremely important to understand that this new food must be the only thing your pet eats. This means no treats or human food. Dermatologists even suggest that flavorless medications, including heartworm preventatives, vitamins, etc, should be avoided as well. If the food trial is a success, then your pet can remain on this food for the remainder of their life. Regular recheck appointments will be necessary during this time period to ensure resolution of any infections and to discuss the progress of the food trial.
- 2) **Anti-histamines**: There are numerous over the counter anti-histamines available including Benadryl, Claritin, Tavist and others. These medications work to decrease the amount of itchiness and redness your pet experiences. However, they are not effective in every pet. Also, some pets may respond better to different types of anti-histamines. You should continue trying anti-histamines until you find one that works. Please talk to your veterinarian for an appropriate dose for your pet. There are few side effects noted, with mild sedation being the one most commonly seen.
- 3) **Shampoos and conditioners**: These are valuable sources of anti-itch, antibacterial and anti-yeast medications. You should first give your pet a bath with regular pet shampoo to remove any dirt and debris. Then follow with the medicated shampoo. The key for these shampoos to work is to allow them to soak into the coat for 5-10 minutes prior to rinsing it off. You can give your pet a bath 1-2 times per week. The drawback of using shampoos is that they only allow up to a couple of hours of relief.
- 4) **Omega-3 Fatty Acids (EPA) or Fish Oil**: Omega-3 fatty acids compete with the inflammatory cascade to decrease the amount of inflammation brought on by allergies. Their effectiveness is questionable, but some pets do respond really well to these supplements. It may take up to 12 weeks for it to reach high enough

levels to make a noticeable difference. You can buy these supplements over the counter or at the Patton Veterinary Hospital.

- 5) **Steroids**: Steroids are great medications for decreasing itchiness and inflammation. We prefer to use them for short term use and only if your pet is extremely itchy or their ears are severely inflamed to help get them over the hump. However, when used long term their side effects become more of a problem than the allergy itself. Steroids only provide a quick fix. They do not offer a long term solution.
- 6) **Flea and Mange Control**: Proper flea control is very important in preventing flea infestation. There are many topical flea medications on the market. We carry Frontline and Promeris at Patton Veterinary Hospital. Promeris is advantageous because it also provides some protection against the mange mites Sarcoptes and Demodex. In order to rule out one of these allergies, you should apply 1 dose to your pet's skin once every 2 weeks for 3 treatments.
- 7) **Allergy injections**: This treatment is given to pets suspected or confirmed to have atopy, or a seasonal allergy. The vaccine is made based off an allergy test performed on the pet.
- 8) **Atopica (Cyclosporine)**: This medication is an oral pill that modulates your pet's immune system so that they do not flare up as bad to whatever they are allergic to.

Allergies have been termed a curse by some. And they are probably not far off. Just ask anyone who has allergies. That is why we like to get to the root of the problem rather than just providing temporary relief. When you decide to perform a food trial, veterinarians rely heavily on you for a successful food trial. I know it is not easy to make sure your pet only eats the new food, especially in multiple animal households. But if you are able keep up with the food trial, and it is a success, your pet will forever thank you. It should be noted, however, that a certain percentage of dogs have both food and environmental allergies. If this is the case, the food trial will only be partially effective and continued anti-itch therapy will be necessary. If your pet has year round allergies, but it intensifies 1-2 times per year your pet may be in this category.

If you have any questions or concerns, I will be more than happy to discuss them with you.

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