

Allergies

Cats can be victims of allergies just like humans.

The incidence of allergies in pets seems to be growing as well as in humans. People with allergies will, most likely, sneeze, wheeze when breathing, or even have more serious breathing problems. In pets, allergic reactions are characterized by skin problems exacerbated by their main symptoms: itching and scratching. Allergies in cats are placed in three main categories: dermatitis from flea bite allergy, atopy and food allergy. Many pets can suffer from one or more allergy.

Food allergy

What is a food allergy and what are the symptoms?

Food allergy is an allergic reaction to one or many ingredients in the pet's food. The most frequent allergens are product milk or beef based products, cereals (wheat, corn, and soy), chicken and eggs. The exact cause of food allergy is not yet known. It is possible that a change in the animal immune system is the reason that some ingredients are perceived like "strangers", which triggers that inflammatory process to fight the "intruder".

The most frequent symptoms of food allergy are itching, licking and biting. Some skin problems are also frequently associated to food allergy. Some pets also suffer from diarrhea or other digestive problems. Symptoms can appear at any age whether the animal has a new diet or he has been eating the same thing for many years.

How to diagnose a food allergy?

The only effective way to diagnose a food allergy is to put the animal under a "hypoallergenic" diet or an "exclusion" diet for at least 8 to 12 weeks. This type of diet has ingredients to which the animal has never been exposed. Protein sources being the main cause for allergies, exclusion diets usually contain proteins – more often game meat, fish or duck – that we do not usually find in pet food. An exclusion diet can be composed of homemade ingredients or commercial hypoallergenic products. Ask your veterinarian what he recommends.

After having done the exclusion diet for the recommended period, you should see your pet's allergy symptoms lessen considerably if he is not allergic to the new ingredients. To identify the responsible allergen, consult your veterinarian to know the right steps to follow.

How to treat a food allergy?

The best way to treat food allergy in your animal is to monitor closely what he is eating to avoid a relapse. In rare cases the veterinarian can also prescribe antihistamines and steroids.

Dermatitis from flea bite allergy is a skin disease caused by an allergic reaction to flea saliva. A single flea bite can trigger the intense itching that characterizes this affliction. The diagnostic is given following the symptoms and the presence of fleas or their waste. Treatment consists in treating the dermatitis and killing the fleas.

What is dermatitis from flea bite allergy and what are the symptoms?

Dermatitis from flea bite allergy (DFBA) is also called flea bite allergy. Cats afflicted with DFBA will groom excessively by scratching the neck, sides, abdomen, interior of back paws and superior section of the tail which will often cause hair loss. DFBA is often the cause of pyotraumatic dermatitis (hot spot), which are localised skin infections. You can find fleas and flea feces (that look like blackheads) on your pet. However many cats with DFBA have very little fleas because they lick and bite themselves constantly.

Atopy

What is atopy and what are the symptoms?

Atopy is an allergic reaction to substances in suspension in the air like pollen, mold, dust mites and animal dander (skin or hair fragments).

This type of allergy is more frequent in dogs but some cats are also afflicted. The incidence of atopy depends as much of the genetic predisposition than the exposition to the allergen itself (An allergen is the factor causing the allergic reaction.)

The main symptom of atopy is itching, generally the head, foot, the inferior part of the ribcage and the belly. According to the factor in cause, this allergy can be seasonal (if it is due to pollen) or last year-round (if it is due to mold, dust mite and dander). Pyotraumatic dermatitis, other skin infection and ear problems can also happen. An animal that scratches a lot due to chronic irritation may lose his hair. These symptoms can appear between 4 months and 7 years old but we usually detect them between 1 to 3 years old.

How to diagnose atopy?

To confirm the atopy diagnosis, we proceed by elimination. Other causes of itching like fleas, mites, lice, infection caused by bacteria or yeast as well as food allergy must be excluded first. The veterinarian will ask you a detailed historic of the itching problems in your pet.

Skin and blood tests can be done to detect different allergens so the exact cause of the problem.

How to treat atopy?

Atopy is a chronic disease for which no curative treatment exists. However, there are ways to take charge of this problem and decrease its incidence on your cat. The veterinarian will know how to relieve the itching and try to find the responsible allergens.