



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Why is my Dog so Itchy?! It Might be Allergies**

*By M. Kathleen Shaw DVM*  
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Spring is here and while we love the blooming flowers, trees, and grass for our pets with allergies, it can be a nightmare. Seasonal allergies (atopy) is one of the most common skin disorders in dogs. It is an inherited allergic reaction to pollen, grass, mold, or one of many things Mother Nature makes. These dogs also have certain areas of the body where the skin is defective and doesn't form a good barrier, allowing these allergens to contact it and trigger an immune reaction. The result is your dog is miserable: it's intensely itchy and uncomfortable and it's made worse by secondary bacterial and yeast infections. This includes the ears. Imagine how would feel to have mosquito bites all over your body all of the time, and you'll get an idea of how your dog feels.

Before we even begin to try to control atopy, it is crucial that we start by preventing another main cause of itchy skin: fleas and ticks. Even though you don't see fleas or are only seeing a few fleas on your pet, monthly flea/tick prevention is crucial. If your pet is allergic to them, just one flea bite can make your dog intensely itchy and this can mimic atopy. Your veterinarian can identify and treat any other skin problems such as other parasites, bacterial, or yeast infections. Sometimes a hormonal problem such as a low thyroid level (dogs) can make the skin barriers weak and lead to infection and itching. Once these other contributors are under control, treatment options for the atopy can be explored.

Treatment for atopy often starts with symptomatic care, which is always a good place to start if your dog is mildly itchy. The advantage is it doesn't cost as much, is very safe, and you see relatively quick benefits. It doesn't require monitoring blood work or more expensive medications. The downside is that it is not as effective as the drugs and is labor intensive. The single most important thing you can do to help your itchy dog with atopy is bathing. Despite the widespread belief that frequent baths will dry out the skin, most dermatologists agree that you cannot over-bathe an allergic dog *provided you use a veterinary skin barrier repair product and moisturizer after bathing*. Wipe down your dog's feet and undercarriage after coming in from outside twice a day. This will help remove the allergens from the skin. Keep the hair coat short to decrease the "dust mop" effect where it collects even more allergens when outside. Remember if your pet has atopy, you will want to choose a flea/tick preventative that is not susceptible to being washed away from repeated bathing.

Other symptomatic treatments for atopy include essential fatty acids, topical anti-inflammatory products, and antihistamines. Your veterinarian can help you come up with the doses and frequency of administration of medications to symptomatically treat atopy.

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If symptomatic care is not controlling your pet's itching, we must then consider additional therapies. There are two options: Allergy Specific Immunotherapy (ASIT) or medications. ASIT involves blood or skin testing to determine which allergens are affecting your pet. It can be one of the easier, safer, and more cost-effective therapies and has a long-term track record of safety and efficacy. Once results are obtained, the dermatologist can formulate a plan for treating your pet with "allergy shots" much the same as in human medicine. Medications can be very effective for controlling atopy and are used in conjunction with symptomatic therapy. As with any drug, it's important to look at the risk vs. benefit to the pet. Your veterinarian, who knows your pet, can tailor the treatment.

It is important to understand that atopy is a frustrating, chronic disease and the goal is to improve your pet's quality of life and decreasing the itching. It is a disease that is controlled, rather than "cured". Your veterinarian will tailor a treatment plan to your dog, considering your pet's tolerance to the treatment and also your ability to administer it. Your dog will likely have flare-ups from time to time, making it necessary to alter the treatment plan, so keep in contact with your veterinarian and don't assume because one treatment is not helping that none of them will.

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