

# Vets Park

for the pets in your life - your vet for life

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**Atopy**

Your dog has been diagnosed with atopy. This means we have found that they are allergic to certain environmental substances such as pollen, dust, mold and mites.

It is important to understand that this condition cannot be cured only managed. Flare ups of the condition are to be expected and must be managed.

Before we can start an appropriate treatment plan we may need to treat your pet with antibiotics, for up to 6 weeks, and shampoos to clear up secondary bacterial or yeast infection of the skin. Ear disease is also often caused by atopy and so ear cleaning and medication may also be needed.

Dogs with atopy often have problems with their anal glands as allergies cause an increased secretion of anal gland material.

### **Management of Atopy**

The care of pets with atopy has advanced rapidly in recent years. We will probably recommend a multi-modal approach using more than one type of treatment.

1. Excellent, regular parasite control is vital even though the underlying atopy is not caused by parasites, they can make matters worse if left untreated.
2. Anti-histamines such as 'Piriton' might be advised to reduce itching due to histamine release.
3. We may be able to recommend use of a desensitisation programme (immunomodulation) using a vaccine which can be given by injection under the skin or squirted into the mouth.
4. High levels of essential fatty acids have been shown to reduce irritation in many dog's with atopy.
5. If your dog has an allergy to pollen then make sure you avoid walking them when the pollen is highest (around noon to early afternoon in the summer). Instead go early or wait until the cooler afternoons. When you get home wipe your dog over with a damp towel to remove pollen from the coat. Keep your dog indoors when you are mowing the lawn.
6. Treat your house against house-dust mites at least once every 12 months. Vacuum regularly and try to use a bagless vacuum cleaner.
7. Prevent your dog from sleeping on the bed and use anti-allergy sheets to cover the bedding,
8. For dust allergies you should wash your dog's bedding

more often and mop the area where they sleep at least once a week to control dust. Put your dog's bean bag bed in the deep freeze to kill mites. Avoid giving your dog soft toys.

9. Regular shampoos may be needed with anti-yeast preparations or soothing oatmeal shampoo.
10. If your dog is allergic to storage mites then feed canned food or store your dry food in airtight containers and do not feed the crumbs at the bottom. Wash the container between batches of food.
11. For dogs that lick their feet we may recommend special medicated wipes for daily treatment between the toes.

### **Immunomodulation**

The goal of immunomodulation (also called desensitisation) is to build up your dog's immune system so that they no longer react to the specific allergens. A special "vaccine" is made that contain only those allergens your pet has shown a reaction to. Your dog's immunotherapy vaccine must be kept in the fridge. This vaccine is then injected in slowly increasing amounts. This is the 'build up' phase. The aim is to determine your dog's optimal dose without experiencing adverse reactions. This is then the maintenance dose which is given once a month for life, called the 'maintenance phase'.

You need to be around for one hour after giving the injection to monitor your dog for signs of adverse reactions. It is sensible to give the injections when you know we are open in case you need to call us. Do not exercise or feed your dog for one hour following injection.

Around 90% of dogs will show an improvement in their clinical signs after immunotherapy. Many dogs will show mild transient reactions such as increased redness or itchiness in the first few weeks of immunotherapy. If this is very severe then stop the treatment and let us know.

On average it takes 3-4 months to see an improvement and so it is important to be patient.

Immunotherapy is time consuming and takes a commitment from you to make sure your dog gets the right amount of vaccine at the right time. Most owners worry that they will not be able to inject their dogs and yet we find that almost all dogs tolerate it very well. If you prefer you can bring your dog in for our nurses to administer the immunotherapy.