



Allergic Skin Disease – the holistic approach

Allergies can manifest on the skin (rashes and hotspots), in the ears, the respiratory tract (asthma), and in the digestive tract (vomiting, diarrhea, constipation). They occur as a result of the body's hypersensitivity to one or more antigenic substances called allergens. These allergens do not cause symptoms in most individuals but in certain people and animals, an immune dysfunction causes a hyperactive reaction of the immune system and symptoms start to manifest themselves. In many cases, the symptoms are skin-related and animals suffer from hotspots and overall itchiness.

Who gets allergies?

Why do some people and animals get allergies and others don't? First we consider the genetic makeup, which may contribute to a weak or hyperactive immune system. Second, we look at the toxin load in the body, including those which originate outside the body and those coming from within. Outside toxins may stem from poor quality foods, chemicals such as pesticides, fertilizers, drugs, vaccines, microbial and parasitic toxins, heavy metals and others. Inside, the body is producing toxins of its own in the form of byproducts of digestion and normal metabolism. If the animal's system is overloaded or malfunctioning, these toxins are incompletely eliminated. Major organs that are required to detoxify the body, such as the liver, kidney and digestive tract become overworked and overwhelmed, and, affected by toxins themselves, can no longer fully accomplish their tasks. All of these toxins can lead to blocked enzyme systems and free radical damage, which can result in immune impairment and inflammation. Any system or organ can be affected primarily or secondarily. Since the skin is an eliminative organ, it does its best to take over when the bowel, liver and kidneys are not performing their roles. Hotspots occur as toxins are "blowing out through the skin."

The condition known as "leaky" gut represents a third contributing factor to the allergic state. In this condition, the intestinal barrier becomes compromised and larger molecules pass through and end up circulating in the blood. There the immune system has to complete the process of digestion which eventually sets off a host of immune responses, one of which is allergy. Allergens may come into the body from eating, inhaling or contact but in most cases the intestinal tract is involved. Even if an animal is allergic to pollens or house dust, you may still find the underlying problem in the gut.

Finally, the fourth contributing factor to allergies is an imbalance of microbial flora anywhere on or in the body where bacteria normally live (particularly in the bowel). Known as intestinal dysbiosis, unfriendly bacteria, yeast and/or parasites begin to outnumber the friendly intestinal bacteria necessary for optimal health. It results from improper diet, oral antibiotic treatment, and infection by bacteria, yeast, viruses or parasites. This condition can lead to leaky gut.

The natural way to treat allergies

Firstly, most patients will benefit from a change in diet – both to supply the nutrients needed for improved health, but also to improve gut function. A plan will be made to let the gut rest for a time, offering simple foods, probiotics, and omega 3 fatty acids. Then simple novel protein raw foods will be recommended to better balance the diet, but still making it easy for the gut to digest. Common food allergens such as grains, pork, beef, and potato will need to be avoided. Also, avoiding plastic food bowls, chemical cleaners, detergents and pesticide products is essential. In some cases, a fast will be prescribed during which time a homemade chicken or turkey broth plus honey or blackstrap molasses (for calories) will be fed, for example to start treatment for a hotspot problem. Fasts of 2-3 days are quite safe in strong individuals. A one day per week fast is a good maintenance plan. Fasting is never recommended for cats because of the risk of hepatic lipidosis, a serious and often fatal condition.

Most commercial foods “are processed at high temperature and pressure, which creates an interaction between the carbohydrates and the protein in the food and produces “maillard” proteins. These new chemicals are highly allergenic. If the bowel is leaky, the allergens will go through the filter.” When changing your companion’s food to home prepared, make sure you do your research so you feed a well balanced diet.

Dr. Sthamann begins treatment with the diet changes discussed above and then starts homeopathic treatment to enhance and support immune system health.

Supportive supplements

Vetri Probiotic BD by Vetriscience contains prebiotics, probiotics, digestive enzymes, L Glutamine and Pepsin and Ginger to soothe the gut.

(EFAs) Omega 3 from fish oils help decrease inflammation.

Digestive enzymes are recommended with meals to assist digestion and between meals for their anti-inflammatory effect.

Dermastrength supplement by Vetriscience – contains Grape seed extract, perilla seed extract, Vitamin E, Omega 3's, Zinc, Vitamins B3 and A, Vitamin C, MSM and several amino acids. This combination includes antioxidants to decrease free radical damage and heal the gut and skin.

Bovine colostrum can help heal the gut.

Bioflavonoids such as quercetin and hesperidin (to name just a few) can have an antihistamine effect which can help alleviate the allergic reaction. In some patients, smoothies and juices which contain ingredients such as green leafy vegetables, carrots, celery, cucumber, yams, sprouts and fruit such as berries, supplies needed antioxidants phytochemicals and vitamins which are integral to health. Also: Coconuts – very nutritious – are antioxidants, help heal wounds, and act as an NSAID (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug).

Limit exposure to toxins and allergens

For obvious reasons, it's best to avoid further toxins as much as possible. Avoid pharmaceutical drugs such as flea and heartworm prevention unless deemed necessary, as well as antibiotics, antihistamines, steroids etc. Vaccines can stress the already fragile immune system and in these cases a titer test should be done to determine if your animal is still protected from previous immunizations. Also try to avoid chemical fertilizers and pesticides (wipe your animal down after a walk), contact allergens such as poison ivy, fleas, toxins in meat (use chemical-free or organic meat when possible) and veggies and fruits (use organic or peel these). Use spring, distilled or reverse osmosis water.

Topical treatments can help short term

While they won't cure the allergy, topical treatments will provide some pain relief from pain and itchiness and prevent self-mutilation.

You may have to use E-collars (head cones) to prevent your companion from scratching himself to pieces.

Topical solutions include products with a) **aloe gel**, b) **calendula ointment**, c) **vitamin E**, d) an application of 8 parts **oatmeal water** (made by mixing one cup raw oat flakes and 8 cups water in a blender and straining through a cheese cloth), e) one part calendula tincture, one part hypericum tincture, f) tea bags (moisten and apply to hotspots), g) **witch hazel**, h) **probiotic powder** or i) **colostrum powder**.

Cold or hot applications, either locally or in the form of a bath, may help ease the irritation. Washing feet daily helps to minimize absorption of allergens, both thru the skin and ingested when an animal licks their feet.

Hotspot areas should be shaved or scissored to clear away hair and then gently cleansed with a mild soap and water solution. For painful spots, one can apply **bee propolis**, which numbs the skin. Also known as Royal Jelly and Bee Pollen, it contains a high amount of vitamin B5 – (pantothenic acid) – helps topically to increase the rate of healing.

As well, pleasurable distractions such as walks, playtime, massage and raw bone chewing can help to get through difficult hotspots. As much as possible try not to use suppressive treatments such as hydrocortisone, which can do long term damage.

Making better health your goal

Using natural means, mildly allergic animals will sometimes recover quickly and completely. Severely allergic animals may take six to twelve months or more to get to a complete cure or may only achieve reasonable management of the problem. A few may improve tremendously and get back to only seasonal allergies as opposed to year round suffering. By combining time and patience with a holistic approach better control of allergic disease is possible.