

Treating Allergy Step-by-Step

STEP 1 LOOK FOR THE OBVIOUS

<input type="checkbox"/> Scabies (plus pinnal-pedal reflex)	<input type="checkbox"/> Food Allergy
<input type="checkbox"/> Flea Allergy (lumbar dermatitis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 1 year • Older than 5 years • Perianal Dermatitis • Predisposed Breeds • GI Symptoms

Step 1:

Most itchy dogs have symptoms that are confusing; however, there are some characteristic symptoms that are typical for certain diseases.

1. 80% of dogs with scabies will thump their leg when you rub/scratch their ear margin. Skin scrapes for scabies are only 20% accurate.
2. Any itch or dermatitis on the lumbar area (behind the ribs) is most likely flea allergy; even if fleas are not observed. Capstar administered orally every 48 hours for 1 month will resolve flea allergy dermatitis.
3. Food allergy is difficult to diagnose but if a dog has dermatitis around its anus or is a German breed or is less than 1 year of age; food allergy is likely and a food trial should be performed.
4. If a dog is foot licking, it is most likely atopic (environmental allergies)

STEP 2 WHAT ARE THE INFECTIONS?

Perform 3-Slide Technique (Slide 1: Ear Swab; Slide 2: Skin Scrape/Impression Smear; Slide 3: Tape Preps)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pyoderma	<input type="checkbox"/> Otitis (Cocci, Yeast, Pseudomonas)
<input type="checkbox"/> Demodex	<input type="checkbox"/> Pododermatitis (Cocci, Yeast)
<input type="checkbox"/> Dermatophytosis	<input type="checkbox"/> Yeast Dermatitis

Step 2:

80% of allergic dogs have secondary bacterial or yeast skin or ear infections.

1. It is impossible to look at the lesions and guess what is the cause of the infection.
2. Every dog with skin disease should be screened for secondary infections.
3. Cytology is the only way to confirm which infections are present.
4. If used for every case, the 3 slide technique will generate income, represents best medicine and saves the owner time and money by avoiding therapeutic misadventures.
5. The 3 slide technique is easy, fast, and accurate.
 - a. Every dermatology case should be screened using the 3 slide technique.
 - b. Technicians can be rapidly trained to perform the screening.
 - c. Technicians are often more patient and thorough than doctors.
 - d. One fee for all 3 slides makes it easier to implement this strategy.
 - e. What are the 3 slides?
 - i. Skin scrapes for demodex or scabies
 - ii. Skin impression smears or tape preps for bacteria or yeast
 - iii. Ear swabs for cocci, yeast, or pseudomonas.

STEP 3 CONSIDER APPROPRIATE MEDICATIONS

- ATOPICA® (Cyclosporine capsules, USP) MODIFIED
- Topicals (Disinfecting shampoo, Anti-itch conditioner)
- Antihistamines
- Essential Fatty Acids
- Sleep Promoters
- Dex Na Phos

Step 3:

If no obvious diseases exist and the infections are identified for treatment; the patient will likely respond to symptomatic therapy.

1. Every allergic dog should be bathed in disinfecting and anti-itch shampoo; weekly.
2. If a rescue dose of steroids is necessary for SEVERE itch, Dexamethasone injection can be administered to stabilize the mast cell membranes and "reset" the itchy inflammation.
 - a. Injectable dex only lasts for a few days and rarely causes problems.
 - b. The patient does not need the LONG duration of effect of DepoMedrol or Vetalog but rather only needs a quick reset to allow the alternative medications to work better.
 - c. It is too easy for owners to get refills of oral steroids making injections easier to regulate by the doctor. This also insures a recheck visit and infection screening so that pyoderma or yeast dermatitis is not treated with steroids.
3. Antihistamines and essential fatty acids are beneficial with almost no adverse effects.
 - a. EFAs can be administered through the diet. Any food trial diet or joint diet will have LOADS of EFAs.
 - b. Any antihistamine that reduces the symptoms is the one that should be used. Consider Clemastine and amitriptyline as they are non-sedation and cheap..
4. Benadryl is a useful antihistamine and sleep promoter.
5. Atopica can be a first line treatment choice if more conservative therapies fail (antihistamines, EFAs, etc). Some owners may want to select the most effective treatment option as the initial therapy.
6. A food trial does not have to be performed before treating with Atopica unless there are suggestive symptoms (see Step 1).
7. Atopica is the only treatment in this group that actually targets the cause of the allergy; the T helper cells.

STEP 4 IF THESE OPTIONS DON'T WORK,
PERFORM AN ALLERGY WORK-UP.

- Food Trial
- Allergy Testing
 - Serum
 - Skin
- Scabicidal Trial
- Referral to a Veterinary Dermatologist

Step 4:

If the patient has not responded before step 4, it is likely going to be a frustrating case to manage and referral should be seriously considered.

1. Referral will be the fastest and easiest option for resolving the allergic symptoms if nothing has worked so far.
2. The food trail is placed in step 4 because, unless there are obvious suggestive symptoms, food trials in a general practice settings are very unrewarding.
 - a. If 100 itchy dogs are evaluated, food allergy is likely the allergic cause in 15% (15 dogs). Based on the AAHA 2003 Compliance Study, food trials are only 14% successful. Therefore, 15 dogs with only a 14% success rate = 2% overall success.
 - b. Only 2 out of 100 itchy dogs would be successfully treated with a food trail if every dog was forced through a food trial due to the rarity and lack of owner compliance.
 - c. Due to this low success rate, it is logical to delay the food trial until other more successful therapies are attempted.
3. Allergy testing is most successful if the patients are diligently followed and even micromanaged. Typically, dermatologists do this better.
 - a. Performing both a blood test and skin test simultaneously is ideal.
 - b. Blood tests can be used successfully if the patients are closely monitored.
 - c. Skin testing has been the historical "gold standard" but is not without flaws.
4. If the patient has not been treated for scabies yet, now is the time: just in case it is an atypical presentation.

Treating The Itchy Dog

