

## What is an allergy?

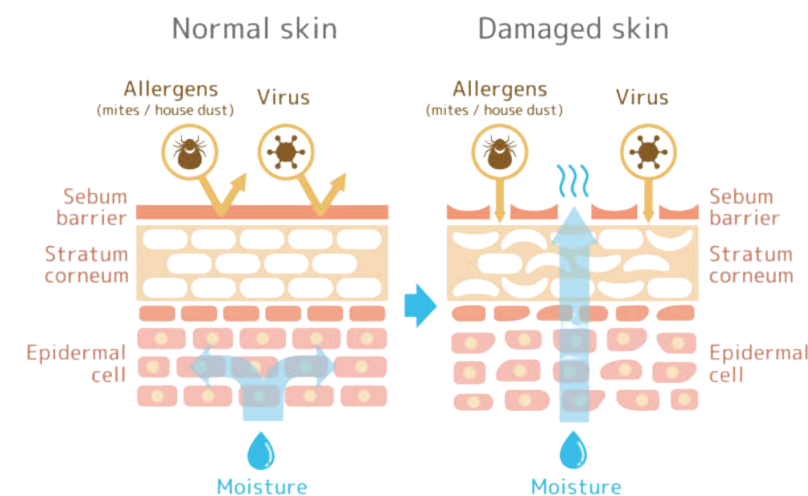
An allergy is when your dog's immune system has an overreaction to what would normally be considered a harmless substance – this substance is known as an allergen.

Allergies in dogs are not uncommon and around 20-30% of dogs suffer from canine allergic skin disease, which is also referred to as canine atopic dermatitis.



## The importance of the skin barrier

The outer protective layer of the skin is designed to act as a barrier, which helps retain moisture and repel harmful substances. However, in some allergic dogs this barrier is defective and lets things like allergens, bacteria and viruses in. Your dog's immune system sees them as a threat and instigates an inflammatory allergic response that results in itching.



## How can I find out if my dog has an allergy?

In order to reach a diagnosis of allergy, your vet will need to know as much information as possible about your dog's history and symptoms. They will then conduct a thorough work-up, which involves ruling out all other possible causes of your dog's symptoms, as shown in the diagram below, before being able to make a diagnosis of allergy.

## Symptoms of allergy in dogs

The severity, type and timing of allergy symptoms vary from dog to dog. In one dog, symptoms may be mild and only be present in one area of the body, such as the ears or paws, at a particular time of the year, these are known as 'seasonal allergies'; whilst another dog may have more severe symptoms that affect much of the body and remain present year-round, these are known as 'non-seasonal' allergies.



## Food allergy and diet trials

Food allergies can cause many of the same symptoms as environmental allergies, and it is impossible to know from symptoms alone, which type of allergy they have.

Whilst it is common for a dog to have both food and environmental allergies, some may have just a food allergy alone, and eliminating the problem food from their diet can solve the problem and prevent the need for life-long medication. For those dogs who are suffering from both food and environmental allergies, removing the problem food from their diet may reduce the level of medication they need.

The only way to diagnose a food allergy is to conduct a diet trial. A diet trial involves feeding your dog a very strict diet for up to 8 weeks. If the symptoms improve, it is possible that ingredients in the original food may be the problem. In order to confirm this, you then give your dog the original food again to see if the symptoms return (this is known as 'rechallenging'). A food test can help guide you and your vet in the selection of ingredients to include in the diet trial.



## The Canine Skin Allergy Journey

Managing a dog with skin allergies can be a lifelong challenge. We call it a journey because allergy is a complex condition that requires careful navigation to best suit each individual animal. The desired 'destination' – your dog's symptoms being well-controlled long-term - is reached by working closely with your vet to map out the best route to get there, for both you and your dog.

Unfortunately, when it comes to allergy there is no 'quick fix' and there may be challenges along the way. However, having a better understanding of allergy and being prepared for these challenges will help improve your chances of managing your dog's condition successfully.

This guide will provide you with an overview of the Canine Skin Allergy Journey, what to expect and how you can help manage it.

## Allergy testing and allergen avoidance

If your dog, after many rule-outs, is diagnosed with a skin allergy to something in the environment (also known as canine atopic dermatitis), it is time to find out what your dog is allergic to and how this can best be managed.

Allergy tests are really useful to help identify which individual allergens your dog is allergic to, and will provide you with additional management and treatment options for your dog. The most common and simple way to identify allergens is for your vet to take a small blood sample from your dog and send it to a laboratory for testing; this is called serological allergy testing. An alternative method is for small amounts of different allergens to be applied to your dog's skin and any reaction monitored; this is called intradermal allergy testing.

Identifying the problem allergens will allow you to be more proactive in reducing your dog's exposure to them and also inform what might be included, should you decide on a treatment called allergen-specific immunotherapy (ASIT).

## Treating canine allergic disease

There are a number of different treatments available to help manage your dog's symptoms, and your vet will work closely with you to establish exactly what will work best for you and your dog.

Often, a 'multi-modal' approach (a combination of treatments, including anti-itch medications, allergen-specific immunotherapy and topical products, alongside allergen avoidance measures) will be recommended. Allergen-specific immunotherapy (ASIT) is the only available treatment that can change, or reverse, the actual cause of the allergy, as well as improving symptoms and potentially preventing progression of the disease.

## Practical tips to reduce flare-ups

**Tackle allergy from all angles** – working out the right combination of proactive treatments and management options can help in terms of time, cost and most importantly in your dog's wellbeing.

**Develop a flare-up radar** – there are often tell-tale signs that your dog's skin is getting worse; if you can detect this before they've really had a chance to flare, it's possible to settle the skin much more quickly.

**Get support ASAP** – if notice a potential problem speak to your vet straight away, so that it can be addressed quickly.

**Learn to predict when flare-ups are likely** – many dogs have a seasonal component to their allergy, so be more vigilant at that time to help spot signs early on.

**Allergens vary from place to place** – so if you are travelling with your dog be aware that the allergens there might be differ in type or in abundance, and be prepared for a flare-up whilst away.

**Monthly maintenance** – schedule a day to carry out 'monthly maintenance'. Check you have sufficient medications, think about how your dog has been over the month, and give their skin (including ears and feet) a proper once-over, and contact your vet if there are any issues.

**Keep an allergy diary** – make a quick note if your dog is showing more signs than normal and anything else that might be relevant or different to usual – e.g., a different walk that day, new treats eaten, medication not given, had been to groomers the day before, etc. If possible, take a photo of any skin changes you notice to show to your vet.

**Communicate with your practice** – if you need to change the way you manage your dog's allergy to better suit you or your dog, work together with your vets to find a solution and help prevent any relapse in symptoms.

## Flare-ups and long-term management

Allergy is a lifelong problem and whilst you will be able to manage your dog's symptoms successfully for much of the time, there may also be a few 'bumps in the road' and times when your dog's symptoms recur or get worse. These 'bumps in the road' are known as 'flare-ups' and are a normal and expected part of the allergy journey.

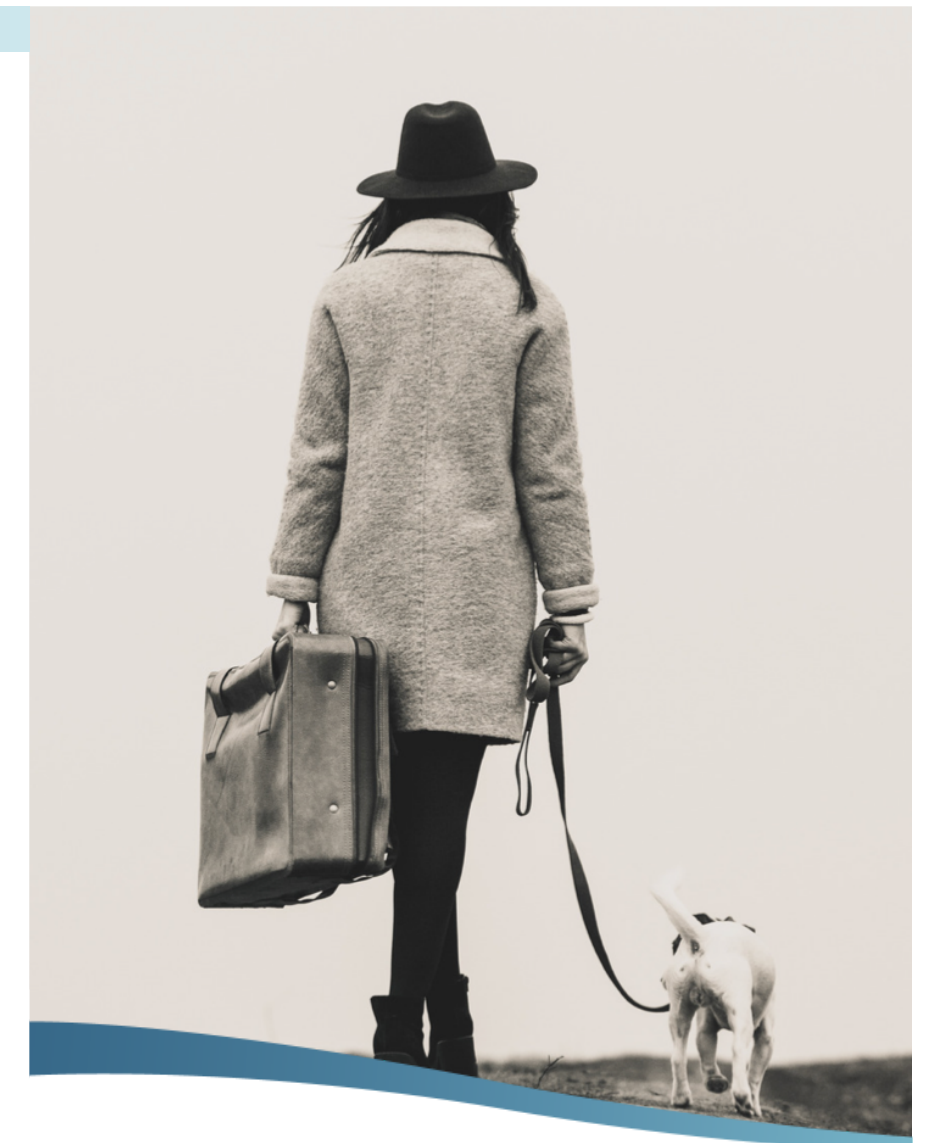
Whilst flare-ups are to be expected, using a multi-modal approach can help you minimise their frequency and severity - using a combination of topical skin products alongside other medications can help provide additional support and reduce the amount of medication needed.

For example, washing your dog regularly with a recommended shampoo or foam can help remove problem allergens from the coat and skin, as well as help support the all-important skin barrier; or using a veterinary recommended ear cleaner regularly can help prevent overgrowth of yeast and bacteria in

your dog's ears and help prevent infection. Once your vet has identified what triggered the flare up, they will be able to advise on appropriate treatment to ease the symptoms and get the skin back under control. If flare-ups begin to occur more frequently, a full review of therapies and management, as well as further investigation may be required.

If you would like to understand more about allergy, allergy testing and allergy management, scan the QR code to visit The Allergy Journey website:

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## The Canine Skin Allergy Journey

An owner's guide to understanding allergy and managing an allergic dog

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