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Your pet has been diagnosed with atopy/atopic dermatitis. This is often the underlying cause of repeated bouts of skin and/or ear disease. It results from an allergic reaction, either to allergens in the environment, or in food. This causes the immune defences in the skin to be reduced, and can cause inflammation and irritation in the skin that leaves it prone to secondary infection. Atopy is not a condition that can be cured, but we can use various treatments to control it, and to minimise the number and severity of flare ups.

The options for treatment include:

Diet

- **Elimination diet trial** – atopic dermatitis can often have a dietary component and dietary allergies can be quite common. Therefore it would be advisable to consider a diet trial. Diet trials often have a slow onset of action so we would advise a minimum of 6-8 weeks before any improvement may be seen. During this time your pet can only eat the specific diet, and must not have any treats or tit bits. The diets that are suitable for this are hydrolysed diets. There are a few different brands available, which we can advise you of if you decide to undergo a diet trial. Many diets are available that are described as “Hypoallergenic”. Most of these are not suitable for an elimination diet trial.

Medication

- **Apoquel** – Apoquel is a tablet that reduces immune responses to reduce the clinical signs of skin allergies. Initially a twice daily dosing regime is started (loading dose) for two weeks. After two weeks this is reduced to once daily dosing. Often this needs to continue long term to adequately control clinical signs, although sometimes it can be used seasonally – often during the spring and summer, and stopped over winter. It is also advisable to run routine bloods to assess your pet’s vital organ parameters every 6-12 months as Apoquel can have long term effects on liver and kidneys.
- **Atopica**- Atopica suppresses the immune system to prevent your pet reacting to the things it is allergic too. It is a capsule (dogs) or liquid (cats and dogs) that is initially given once a day, but can be reduced to every 2-3 days once signs resolve. If your pet is receiving atopica, it is advisable to stop the medication for the 2 weeks before and after they have their annual vaccinations, as it can stop the body responding fully to the vaccinations.
- **Antihistamines** – These are tablet that can be used to stop itching. In relatively mild cases they can be used by themselves, and in more severe cases they can sometimes be used to reduce the dose of other medication (such as steroids) that are used. They are human medications that are not licensed for use in cats and dogs, so are used “off-license”. They can make your pet drowsy.
- **Cytopoint injections** – this is a once-monthly injection. It contains an antibody which stops the itch-receptor in the cells from reacting to its normal stimulus. It can be used alongside other medication.
- **Steroids** - steroids are a very effective medication for stopping inflammation and itching. However, they can cause side effects, particularly making your pet eat a lot, drink a lot and wee a lot. They can cause weight gain, and if used long term can cause thinning of the coat and skin, and a pot

bellied appearance. Because of the side effects your vet will try to reduce the dose to the lowest possible effective dose.

- **Antibiotics** – sometimes an animal suffering from atopic skin disease will have a secondary bacterial infection and will need a course of antibiotics to clear this up. This is not treating the underlying disease, but is needed to allow the flare up to resolve. Antibiotics (either tablets or ear drops) will only be dispensed when a vet has seen the animal and can decide what is appropriate to treat the infection.

Topical Treatment

- **Shampoos** – Bathing with a medicated shampoo once or twice weekly can help to manage yeast and bacterial infections which can be very itchy.
- **Cortavance spray** – this is a steroid spray that helps to reduce irritation. It can be used topically on the areas of irritation.

Other options

- **Allergy bloods and immunotherapy** – there is a blood test available that tests to see what your pet is allergic to. In some cases your pet may be able to avoid these allergens completely, and in other cases immunotherapy vaccines can be made to minimise the allergic reaction (and therefore the skin/ear disease) in response to these allergens. The effect is variable between individuals – approximately a third of animals will have full or near full resolution of clinical signs; a third have a very good response but may still have occasional flare ups; a third have little or no response. The immunotherapy vaccines are given weekly initially, then gradually reduced to once a month.
- **Skin supplement (fish oils, omega3/6)** – skin supplements containing natural oils and omega oils can help to reduce skin irritation. Some dogs respond very well.
- **Flea control** – Fleas and other parasites can contribute to atopic skin disease, and dogs and cats that are atopic often react more strongly to flea bites than most cats or dogs, so it is very important to keep up to date with effective flea preventative medication.