

## Atopic Dermatitis in the Cat

Atopic dermatitis or “atopy” is the name given to cats with inhalant allergies. Allergens such as house dust mite, food storage mite, trees, weeds, grasses, or molds can all cause allergic reactions in cats. House dust mite is the most common allergen in indoor cats. We ALL have dust mites in our homes-they live in bedding, carpet, mattress, upholstery and emerge at night to surround a sleeping body-be it humans or animals!

Atopy in cats is likely hereditary with the gene for allergy emerging at ANY AGE. In our practice, we see atopy most commonly in orange colored cats including tortoise shell and calicos but it certainly is present in other color cats as well.

The signs of atopy in cats are variable: licking or biting off the hair anywhere on the body, tiny crusts on the body (“miliary dermatitis”), facial rubbing, ear infections, sores on the stomach (eosinophilic granuloma complex “ECG”), or just overgrooming with no sores or hairloss. This can occur all year round if the cat is dust mite allergic (or food allergic) or during certain seasons of the year depending upon which allergen the cat is allergic to.

The diagnosis of atopy consists of knowledge of the cat’s history-does he/she do this all year round, is he/she responsive to steroids, has anything changed in the cats environment? Other diseases that can mimic atopy include flea allergy dermatitis, Cheyletiella mite infestation, dermatophytosis (“ringworm”), bacterial skin infection (not very common in cats), or Pemphigus foliaceus. All of these need to be ruled out before the veterinarian can make a diagnosis of atopy. Once that is done, then the cat can be allergy tested via skin tests or blood tests to see which specific allergens they’re allergic to.

Treatment consists of weekly desensitization injections (“immunotherapy”), sublingual allergy drops (another form of immunotherapy), Atopica, or antihistamines. Long term, long acting steroid injections are not advised due to eventual development of heart disease or diabetes. Short term, short acting prednisolone may be used if used sparingly and not every day.

We are happy to help you with your allergic cat and answer any questions you may have!