

## **Atopic Dermatitis in the Dog (“grass allergy”)**

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

Atopy in dogs is hereditary with the gene for allergy emerging usually between 3 months and 3 years of age. Certain breeds can be predisposed such as Labrador retrievers, Golden retrievers, German shepherds, Terriers, and herding breeds. Mixes of these breeds will also be affected.

The symptoms of atopy may be subtle at first but get worse each year the dog gets older. Atopy usually affects the face (ears), feet, and rectal area. A dog may have all 3 of these areas affected or only 1 or 2. If he/she is dust mite allergic, the symptoms will be all year round but in seasonally affected dogs, they will flare with allergy during only certain times of the year.

The diagnosis of atopy is made according to the age of onset of symptoms, breed of the dog, areas of the body affected, and response to medications. Skin testing or blood testing for specific allergens can be performed once the “look alike” diseases that mimic allergy have been ruled out. Those “look alike” diseases include: flea allergy dermatitis, scabies, Cheyletiella mites, bacterial skin infection, demodex mites, and food allergy.

Treatment consists of weekly allergy injections to desensitize, oral allergy drops to desensitize, oral medications such as Atopica or Apoquel or monoclonal antibody injections (Cytopoint). Long-term steroid use should be avoided as the above options for long-term therapy are usually successful. Routine bathing or rinsing to help wash off the allergen is helpful and certain diets containing omega-3 fatty acids have also been shown to help reduce itching and improve skin/coat quality.

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