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### ***Itching, Scratching and Licking – Allergies in Dogs & Cats***

Living with an itchy pet can be extremely frustrating. Besides annoying their human companions continuous, licking and scratching can cause hair loss, self damage, and open wounds along with constant irritation to the pet.

#### **What are common causes of chronic itching?**

In dogs, itching is usual caused by external parasites and allergies. In cats, ringworm (fungal infection), external parasites and allergies, often cause itching..

#### **What are allergies?**

Allergies are when the body is hypersensitive or ‘overreacts’ to harmless substances known as allergens. People with allergies usually have watery eyes, a runny nose, sneezing or asthma. Pets more commonly experience skin problems. In dogs, allergies are seen as redness and itching, recurring skin or ear infections and hair loss. Common areas that are affected are around the eyes and mouth, ears, armpits, abdomen and anal areas. In cats, the problems are usually on the face and back, or they may show up as a rash with tiny scabs called military dermatitis.

#### **What are the major types of allergies in Dogs and Cats?**

**Flea Allergy** – It is the most common skin disease in both dogs and cats. **But I never see fleas on my pet?** Allergies are caused by the flea’s saliva and pets only need one bite to start having problems. Often, the pet scratches so much the adult fleas are removed and hard to find. Fleas may survive in low numbers in people’s homes during the winter. This leads to itching year round.

**Ringworm** – Contrary to the name, ringworm is actually a superficial fungus – not a worm. It is spread by contact with an affected pet or can be spread in the environment. It is often seen in pets that came from shelters or rescues where cats can be stressed and in contact with many other cats. The fungus causes the hair follicles to become weak and fall out. It causes mild irritation leading to itching. Ringworm can be spread to humans that handle affected pets.

**Food Allergy** – Pets can develop specific hypersensitivities to components of their diet. Food allergens can be caused by major proteins or carbohydrates such as beef, chicken, pork, corn, wheat or soy. Dyes and preservatives can also be potential allergens. Food allergies can develop at any time and can occur even if a pet has been eating the same diet for years.

**Everyday Allergies** – Atopic dermatitis is the term for a predisposition to developing skin problems from everyday substances such as pollens, molds, and dust mites.

#### **How do I know what type of allergy my pet has?**

The best way to have your pets allergy diagnosed is to make an appointment with your veterinarian. Often, your veterinarian may recommend tests to narrow down the list such as skin scrapings, skin cultures, skin biopsy, or even intradermal skin testing. Blood testing to look for disorders such as hypothyroidism may also be recommended. Other recommendations may involve year round flea prevention or a prescription diet food trial.

#### **Can Allergies be Cured?**

Unfortunately in many pets allergies are a life-long problem. With the help of your veterinarian allergies can often be controlled, which will help improve the quality of life for you and your pet.

Disclaimer: This written content is meant to be educational and is not medical advice. Always consult a veterinarian about medical advice for your pet.