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Scratch That!

by Dr. Nancy Kay

If you find yourself snarling, “Stop scratching!” several times a day, you probably have an allergic pet on your hands. As with human hay fever, most pet allergies are the result of an overzealous immune system response to allergens such as pollen and mold spores.


Redness and itchy, flaky skin on the face, neck, feet and belly are the primary symptoms for pets with the allergic condition known as atopy.

Luckily, there are many ways to ease the itch associated with atopy (fleas, skin infections, seborrhea and food allergies can also cause itching—rule those out first). When you first notice persistent scratching, ask your vet which of these remedies might work for your pet.

- Limiting exposure may help if skin testing implicates allergens such as feathers, dust mites or tobacco smoke.
- Medicated shampoos applied to the itchy area and left lathered for 10 minutes may relieve the itch in mild cases.
- Antihistamines and fatty acid supplements work in some, but not all cases. Look to your vet for guidance on which choices make sense for your pet.
- Cyclosporine and cortisone alter the immune system’s response to tame the itch. Both have potential side effects, so discuss them thoroughly with your veterinarian.
- Allergy shots are recommended when symptoms persist and other treatments have failed.



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