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CLIENT INFORMATION

from The University of Tennessee
College of Veterinary Medicine

Small Animal Hospital

Dr. D.J. Krahwinkel
Department Head

ANESTHESIA

Dr. Ralph Harvey
Dr. Bob Paddleford

CARDIOLOGY

Dr. Becky Gompf

DERMATOLOGY

Dr. Linda Frank
Dr. Keith Hnilica

MEDICINE

Dr. Joe Bortges
Dr. Jim Bruce
Dr. Bob DeNovo
Dr. India Lane
Dr. Al Legendre
Dr. Dianne Mawby
Dr. Jennifer Stokes

NEUROLOGY

Dr. Bob Selcer
Dr. Billy Thomas

ONCOLOGY

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OPHTHALMOLOGY

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Dr. Dan Ward

ORTHOPEDIC

SURGERY

Dr. Darryl Millis
Dr. Joe Weigel

RADIOLOGY

Dr. Bill Adams
Dr. Greg Daniel
Dr. Sally Mitchell
Dr. Federica Morandi

SOFT TISSUE

SURGERY

Dr. Greg Anderson
Dr. D.J. Krahwinkel
Dr. Karen Tobias

ATOPY

Atopy is the term used in veterinary medicine for the disease condition caused by allergies to environmental substances. These substances, called "allergens", may be pollens, plant or animal fibers, house dust, or molds. Animals with atopy often show symptoms such as scratching, licking their paws, and rubbing their face. Recurrent skin and ear infections caused by bacteria or yeast are commonly associated with atopy.

We can identify what your pet is allergic to by performing allergy tests. Current methods of allergy testing include intradermal skin testing with specific allergens or a blood test to measure allergen specific antibody (IgE) levels in the patient's serum.

Intradermal Skin Testing

The dog or cat is clipped on one side of the chest, and very small amounts of the suspected allergens are injected into the skin. This is slightly uncomfortable but most pets tolerate the procedure quite well. Occasionally, a tranquilizer is necessary to ensure the animal's cooperation. Currently the Dermatology Service at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital skin tests with approximately 60 allergens. The veterinarian evaluates the reactivity of the various allergens within the half-hour following the injections. The entire procedure generally takes about one hour.

Serum Antibody Testing

A blood sample is obtained and prepared for shipment to a regional or national laboratory. The serum is tested to determine the level of specific antibodies (IgE) to allergens commonly found in the region where the pet resides. The results are usually available in 2 weeks.



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Treatment

If a pet is diagnosed as being atopic, there are three methods of therapy. The **first** is to remove the offending allergen from the animal's environment. This is not possible in many cases, but should be considered when wool, feathers, or similar allergens are implicated in the skin test.

The **second** method of therapy is hyposensitization or "allergy shots". These are a series of injections of diluted allergens that are given to make the pet less sensitive to its allergies. Usually the owner can be trained to give the injections at home. Pets may take up to 9 to 12 months to respond to this therapy. Approximately 20% of all dogs given the injections fail to improve.

The **third** type of therapy involves the use of anti-itch drugs. Antihistamines, essential fatty acid supplements, steroids, and topical therapies are used in combination to provide a maximal level of control for the patient's itching. Finding the best combination often takes a little trial and error.