



## Atopy

Atopy ('a-tə-pē) is an allergic skin disorder that causes itching for a few weeks of the year or for much longer (months). This is one of the more frustrating medical problems a pet can have and will require considerable time and effort by the pet's family and veterinarian to manage. It can also be a costly disease over the life of the pet.

The cause of atopy is an over reaction by the body to substances (allergens) in the environment. These allergens are believed to be airborne that land and stick to the pet's skin. The allergens are then absorbed into the pet's body. The paws, inside the flap of the ear, ear canal, muzzle, eyes, and armpit area are the most frequently involved. Atopic pets may be noted to chew their feet, scratch their ears or rub their faces on the ground. However, they are certainly not limited to these symptoms.

Seasonal variations in symptoms may occur as well as flare-ups during certain times of day, e.g. first thing in the morning. Factors that complicate the management of an atopic pet are fleas and a diet deficient in fatty acids. Animals are usually young adults when symptoms begin. Affected animals should not be used for breeding as this can be a hereditary disease.

The diagnosis of atopy is based on symptoms and by ruling out many other diseases. This may involve drug trials, diet trials, fatty acid supplements, hormonal testing, aggressive flea control, antibiotics, medicated shampoos, antiparasite drugs, antihistamines, and /or corticosteroids. The hallmark of testing for atopy is blood allergy testing or intradermal testing. This is done in anticipation of a desensitization program.

Atopy very rarely leads to the premature death of a pet. Appropriate diagnostics and judicious use of medications/desensitization programs and consistent home care should allow you and your pet to enjoy life.