



Honey's Canine Health Guide N°2

ALLERGIES

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A quick overview

Allergy is probably *the* biggest health problem in dogs today. No one can say exactly why this is. Maybe because we have been burdening our dogs' immune systems through too frequent vaccinations, maybe because of highly processed kibble diets and maybe because of in-breeding. Neutering could be another cause. The truth is, it is probably a combination of all these and other factors.

Medical science is not yet able to fully explain why some dogs suffer from allergies. Nor has conventional medical science developed a safe and effective way to treat them.

Interestingly, not only is allergy one of the most common health problems in dogs (and cats), it is the same with humans. In animals, unfortunately, allergy tends to take a much more devastating course than it does in the person suffering from hay fever or allergic eczema.

One reason for this is that the over-the-counter drugs (antihistamines) that bring relief to many human allergy sufferers, rarely have any effect in animals. Allergies in dogs and cats are therefore generally treated with very potent drugs that may have serious health implications when used long term. This is why the allergic dog, who is perhaps prone to ear infections, hotspots or diarrhoea, ends up suffering much more than you might expect, considering that allergy in itself is rarely life threatening.

Dogs suffering from allergies can very easily end up on heavy immune-suppressive medications such as corticosteroids (Prednisolone), cyclosporine (Atopica) or oclactinib (Apoquell). These medicines are given purely as symptomatic treatment as they do nothing to cure the underlying allergic condition. This means that in many cases, the treatment is expected to be long-term, probably lifelong. This is a sad and immensely frustrating situation for everyone involved: the human companion, the vet and, of course, for the dog.

What is allergy?

Allergy is a condition in which the immune system is out of balance and therefore reacts to substances that are not in themselves harmful and, therefore, don't cause a reaction in others. The substances that provoke an immune system in this way are called *allergens*. An individual can develop an allergy to *any* substance, a fact that creates a lot of confusion and makes it difficult to compare experiences, as different allergic individuals may react to different allergens. The only thing that *all* allergic individuals have in common is that their immune system is confused and therefore overreacts to otherwise harmless substances. Examples of common allergens are grass or tree pollen, house dust or storage mites and – perhaps less commonly in animals than in people – certain foods. Dogs and cats with unbalanced immune systems tend to overreact to several substances rather than only one or two.

The allergic reaction happens in one or more of the places where the body meets the environment that it is overreacting to. As a result, allergy causes different problems depending on where in the body the allergic reaction happens. A reaction in the eyes and nose causes hay fever, while in the lower airways it causes asthma. In the bowel you get allergic gastroenteritis (IBS or IBD). When the reaction is in the skin it causes eczema which in dogs often shows itself as itchy skin, ear infections, hotspots or obsessive paw-licking. In dogs, allergic gastro-enteritis and allergic skin disease are the most common forms of allergy.

Types of allergy

- Eyes, nose and throat – causing sneezing and redness
- Lower airways – causing asthma
- Skin – causing eczema, itchy skin, ear infections, hotspots, paw-licking etc.
- Bowel – causing chronic diarrhoea and inflammatory bowel disease (also called IBD or IBS)

Are allergies inherited?

Nobody knows exactly why someone develops an allergy. Many different factors can damage the immune system; some of them (such as vaccination) are known, while others we don't understand at all. This is true for people as well as for animals. We do know that individuals whose parents suffer from allergies have a higher risk of developing an allergy themselves, meaning that it is certainly possible to inherit a weak immune system. This is why allergy is particularly common in some dog breeds. This is not clear cut, however. You cannot predict that an individual puppy (or kitten or human baby) will develop an allergy simply because one or both parents have allergies, only that he does run a higher risk of it happening. It is also entirely possible for an individual to be allergic when no one else in the family has a problem. Still, it must be considered unethical to breed from a dog or cat that is being treated for allergy. A responsible breeder will want to be informed if your dog or cat has been diagnosed with an allergy, as this will influence how the parents are bred in the future. This information is crucial for the improvement of the genetic health of your breed, so never neglect to inform your breeder.

Conventional allergy treatments

Allergy cannot be cured with conventional medicine. This is true for people as well as for animals. Your doctor or vet will tell you, therefore, that allergy is incurable and that the symptoms can only be eased through immune-suppressive medication. This symptomatic relief works very well in the short term, but these are very potent drugs, and their long-term use is always associated with a risk of serious side effects, making it crucial to limit their use.

Allergic dogs and cats rarely respond to treatment with relatively mild drugs like antihistamines. Consequently, potent medicines such as steroids, cyclosporine and other immune-modulating drugs are needed to relieve the symptoms of allergic disease. Some dogs with allergic skin disease respond to immunotherapy (hyposensitisation), which in these cases can help reduce the need for immune-suppressive medication. Immunotherapy involves giving the animal increasing doses of the antigens they are reacting to, in an attempt to get their immune system to tolerate them better. In the many cases in which it makes no noticeable difference, the treatment is discontinued in the first year, but for those who show an improvement it is continued for life. Immunotherapy is currently the only conventional approach that aims to treat the underlying allergy. All other treatments are aimed solely at easing symptoms. An allergic patient receiving ongoing medication to stay comfortable and keep the symptoms at bay has not been cured. The symptoms have merely been suppressed and the long-term cost to his or her health may be high.

Allergy and vaccination

The manufacturer's informational leaflet that accompanies any vaccine always states that only healthy animals should be vaccinated. This should be strictly adhered to. The current vaccination guidelines mean that adult dogs only rarely need to be vaccinated in any case. Do make sure that your veterinarian is adhering to the most recent guidelines. Remember that an allergic animal has a sick immune system and that a vaccine is a strain on the immune system that may worsen the allergic condition.

Holistic allergy treatments

If I were to choose one area above all others where holistic treatments excel, it would be in the treatment of diseases of the immune system. As described above, the toolbox available to the conventional vet will not be able to cure an allergic patient. It holds only drugs to keep the symptoms at bay through ongoing suppression of the immune system. This is often tolerated well in the 'short term' but is rarely a 'safe' long-term approach. The fact that many – vets and dog owners alike – are unaware that allergy often *is* curable means that many animals suffer needlessly or may even be euthanised. Seeing their animals cured after years of ineffective drug treatment, owners often incredulously ask me why no one had told them there were other treatment options.

If your animal requires treatment for allergic disease, whether it shows itself in the skin, airways or gut, do contact a holistic practitioner. Many carers and vets settle for long-term immune-suppressive medication believing this is as close as it is possible to get to a solution. If you know anyone who suffers from an allergy, find an experienced TCM (traditional Chinese medicine), acupuncturist or a classical homeopath. Classical homeopathic treatment or acupuncture will, in many cases, be able to re-balance the immune system, removing the need for what would otherwise have been a life with ongoing symptomatic drug treatment.

The role of diet

Diet has a very important role to play in the treatment of all allergies – not just those that are food related. A natural, raw diet will aid and support optimum health.

Skin allergies can go hand in hand with digestive issues and may be exacerbated if a dog's digestive system is not functioning as it should. A healthy gut can help reduce allergies and intolerances as nutrients are not leaking from the gut causing an immune response. Vitamins, minerals and other nutrients are in their natural form in a raw diet and are more bio-available than, say, artificial supplements.

If there is a known or suspected food allergy, then an exclusion diet using a single novel protein can be useful. However, do remember that only the chosen protein should be fed for the period of the trial (i.e. no other food or treats!) together with, of course, plenty of water. An exclusion diet may need to be followed for as long as six to eight weeks before it is possible to assess the results. It should not be continued indefinitely.

If you live in the UK, Honey's Health Team will be delighted to devise a special dietary plan for your dog designed to tackle allergies. Feeding a natural diet couldn't be easier and we can do all the hard work for you – working out exactly what your dog should eat each day (and how much, of course), explaining what to buy and how to prepare it. If you would prefer, and you will be under no obligation, we will be happy to supply the food you need and deliver it straight to your door.

Free expert advice

At Honey's we will be delighted to provide you with unlimited, free advice – we don't mind if you never, ever plan to become a customer. Moreover, you can also take full advantage of our Health Team (which includes vets, veterinary nurses and other experts) free of charge. We will be pleased to show you how to make your own food, too. We maintain a list of holistic vets, who we are happy to recommend.

To find a veterinary homeopath: www.bahvs.com

To find a veterinary acupuncturist: www.ivas.com

To find a veterinary osteopath: www.associationofanimalosteopaths.com



Free book

If you want to know about canine health and nutrition, then please visit our website and download our free book *Honey's Natural Feeding Handbook for Dogs*, or email us and if you are in the UK, we will pop a free copy in the post.

General information about raw feeding

The connection between good health and diet is well established in humans. We know that if we eat fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, not too much dairy and moderate quantities of animal protein we will live longer, healthier lives. We also know that if we eat processed food or food containing chemical additives, too much fat and too much sugar we will live shorter, considerably less healthy lives.

In fact, it is well proven that everything from allergies to heart conditions and from skin complaints to cancer is caused by a poor diet. What holds good for humans and human food holds good for dogs and dog food. Dogs that eat a natural diet live longer, healthier lives. The problem is that we have lost touch with what the natural, correct diet for a dog actually is. Instead, we feed them the canine equivalent of junk food.

As a result, we are seeing more and more illness in our dogs and they are leading shorter and shorter lives. The development of all sorts of genetic conditions may also be attributable to generations of dogs eating a harmful diet.

Happily, the situation can be quickly and effortlessly corrected. We know what a species appropriate diet for dogs is and it couldn't be easier to replicate a 'wild' diet using 'tame' ingredients. Furthermore, as those who have switched their dogs to a natural diet will testify, the results can be amazing.

Benefits include a glossy coat, healthy skin, lean muscle tone, robust immune system, sweet-smelling breath, healthy teeth and gums, increased energy, better digestion and a strong heart. Dogs eating a raw food diet can be expected to live longer and to suffer less illness and disease. Indeed, if your dog has any health issues now (even minor problems such as allergies, dry skin, bad breath and what the Americans refer to, euphemistically, as 'gas') it is quite likely that a switch to a raw food diet will clear them up.



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The advice and information contained in this fact sheet is for guidance only. The Honey's Health Team (vets, veterinary nurses and other experts) is here to help you in any way we can. However, nothing can replace a physical examination by a vet or other qualified professional.