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ALLERGIES

Let us tell you a little about the broad category of "allergies" that a dog or cat can have. "Allergies" are like a big vat - a vat that hold only so many allergies, then it starts overflowing. Say the vat can hold 10 allergies. Your pet may be allergic to twenty different things, but at most times only 5-10 of these things are present in the environment. If something in the environment changes (for example, the weather gets warmer or colder, or certain pollens are out in full force, or the furnace is turned on, or your pet gets fleas) the number of things present in the environment right now may also increase, and the vat "overflows" and your pet shows signs of allergies - itching, biting, scratching and/or runny eyes and nose. On relatively rare occasions we can diagnose what the pet is allergic to based on the history provided by the owner, the symptoms the pet is showing, and the exam. Sometimes we can just treat the symptoms until we can get this pet through his/her "allergy season." If a dog or cat must receive antihistamines, cortisone or other anti-itch or anti-allergy medication for only several weeks per year, it may not be worth it to the pet or to the owner to pursue diagnosis of the allergy. But, if the pet must be on high doses of medication for months or years, it is definitely advisable to consider investigating WHAT allergy or allergies the pet has.

Just as with people, pets can develop allergies. An allergy can be developed only after a pet has had previous exposure to that thing to which it is allergic. For example, if the dog has a flea allergy, it had to have been exposed sometime in the past to fleas. If a person is allergic to bee stings, he must have been stung some- time in the past; and, now when he is stung, he may have a severe enough reaction so that he may die.

Many other factors also affect allergies. For example, the pet's general health, hypothyroidism, stress, and diet are many times responsible for aggravating allergic "conditions."

Just as in humans, pets can manifest their allergies in a variety of ways. People with allergies usually sniffle and sneeze, have an asthma attack or break out in hives. The cells responsible for allergic reactions in people are located in the sinuses, linings of the eyes and nose, and in the skin. In dogs and cats, those allergy cells are located primarily in the skin and gastrointestinal tract. There- fore, most pets itch, throw up, and/or have diarrhea with allergies.

Examples of allergies in pets are as follows:

- 1) **Flea Allergy Dermatitis**: Dogs and cats scratch and chew primarily around their hind quarters, sometimes under their front arms, and, especially with cats, around the neck.
- 2) **Food allergy**: Pets can vomit and/or develop diarrhea from an acquired allergy to some part of their food (beef, chicken, soy, wheat, eggs, milk, food coloring, preservatives, etc.). Cats with allergies to food often scratch the areas between the eyes and ears.
- 3) **Allergies to pollens, house dust, etc.**: Animals can itch anywhere on their bodies. Some dogs with "allergies" just shake their head or scratch their ears.

These symptoms do not tell us WHAT they are allergic to, they only suggest that allergies are present. We will help you as much in possible in providing relief and/or a diagnosis for your pets problem.