

Allergens have been identified: Where do we go from here?

The best treatment is the complete avoidance of these allergens. In the case of flea or food allergies, the avoidance of causative allergens is generally easy, but if the cat is suffering from a pollen or house dust mite allergy, it is nearly impossible to selectively avoid those allergens. In the case of short-lasting seasonal allergies (3 – 4 months), certain medications or precautions can be taken to alleviate the severity of symptoms. Because of adverse side effects, drugs should only be given for limited periods of time in the case of perennial allergies. An allergen-specific immunotherapy (ASIT, hyposensitisation) should be considered for long-term treatment. This kind of therapy is only available for environmental allergens (house dust mites, moulds, and pollen), but not for flea saliva or food ingredients.

What is allergen-specific immunotherapy (ASIT)?

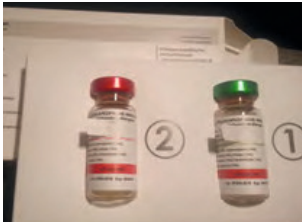
An allergen-specific immunotherapy is based on the results of an allergy test of your cat. Individualised solutions containing the relevant allergens, against which your cat has shown positive reactions in previously performed allergy testing, are prepared and administered to your cat subcutaneously with increasing concentrations and intervals over a longer period of time.

In most cases, this treatment increases the tolerance of your cat's immune system to the respective allergens. Very

often improvements can be seen as early as a few weeks after beginning the treatment. However, sometimes it can take longer (several months) before improvement is noticeable. In about 70 % of cases this type of treatment is effective in at least reducing the severity of allergic signs or completely abolishing the symptoms. In rare cases, side effects may be observed, such as a short-lived worsening of clinical signs. In most cases, your veterinarian will adjust the dosage until the side effects disappear.

Please consider that an allergy is a disease that cannot be cured and will persist lifelong. Therefore, any treatment – also the ASIT – must also last lifelong. It is also possible for allergies to be passed on to offspring, so please take that into consideration should you intend to breed with an affected cat. The only way to deal with an allergy and to improve quality of life for your cat is to identify the causative allergens, try to avoid them to the extent possible and use an allergen-specific immunotherapy (ASIT, see above).

In cooperation with your veterinarian it is possible to make a diagnosis and develop a strategy that will help to achieve a higher quality of life for you and your cat.



HELP & ADVICE

Short compendium:

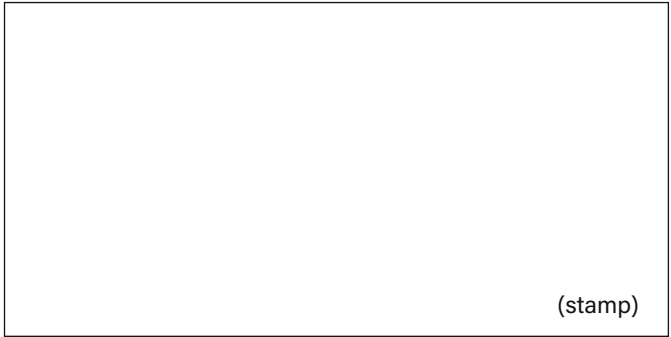
Types of allergies, dermatological signs and their triggers
Flea allergy dermatitis, atopic dermatitis, food allergy, insect allergy

How to recognise allergies
Baldness, small crusts, eosinophilic granuloma complex, deep scratch marks on the neck and head

- Frequent allergens
Pollen, insects, fleas, house dust and storage mites, moulds, food ingredients
- Intradermal test/skin test
- Serological test/blood test
- Food allergy
- ASIT
Allergen-specific immunotherapy



Handed out directly from your vet



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ALLERGIES IN CATS



HELP & ADVICE

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How can you describe allergies?

An allergy – also called hypersensitivity – is a disease which can affect cats in many different ways. Principally, an allergy is an over-reaction of the immune system which can result in various clinical signs. The most important signs in cats are **pruritus** with or without miscellaneous **skin lesions**. The disease can, however, also be characterised by respiratory symptoms, which are described as **allergic asthma**. The severity of allergies can vary widely: some cats only suffer from a harmless type of allergic disease with mild symptoms while others suffer from severe clinical disease which can be seriously detrimental to their quality of life.

Types of allergies, dermatological signs and their triggers

- Flea allergy dermatitis (fleas): dermatological signs, pruritus
- Atopic dermatitis (= allergy against grass, weed and tree pollen, house dust and storage mites, moulds): dermatological signs, pruritus, allergic asthma
- Food allergy (against one or more food ingredients): derma-tological signs, pruritus, gastro-intestinal signs like diarrhoea, vomitus, obstipation
- Insect allergy (various insects): dermatological signs, pruritus

How to recognise allergies in cats

Cats of any age can develop allergies. The first noticeable clinical sign is severe pruritus. Cats use their rough tongue for “scratching”, so pruritus in cats is often noticed as increased grooming, resulting in biting and licking of the skin of different body parts. Many cats prefer to remain unobserved during this intense grooming behaviour, so owners rarely have the opportunity to witness their cat's increased licking or scratching. However, the owner will notice the self- induced skin and coat lesions. In many cases, wisps of hair can be found in places where the cat frequently sleeps.

- Mostly, the owner observes baldness/alopecia on the abdomen, back, paws or other locations of the cat's body – depending on the range of the cat's tongue. The skin of these locations, however, usually remains intact.
- Another clinical sign is the so-called miliary dermatitis: if the cat is suffering from this type of dermatitis, you will find



- many small crusts spread over the cat's back.
- The so-called eosinophilic granuloma complex originates from allergic reactions in cats. The clinical picture can be quite variable: for example, ulcer on the lips (rodent ulcer), elevated red skin lesions mainly on the abdomen (eosinophilic plaque), straight-lined skin lesions on the hind limbs (linear granuloma)
 - Cats that develop allergic reactions to one or more food ingredients often suffer from deep scratch marks on the head and neck (self-induced excoriations). Due to the severe pruritus, these cats may harm themselves so badly that only bandaging the wounds can provide relief. In some cases, even the hindpaws have to be bandaged or soft paws have to be used to prevent the cat from ongoing self-mutilation.

Frequent allergens and their occurrence

Depending on the causative allergen(s), allergies can occur seasonally with varying intensities.

- Pollen and insects mainly appear during the warm season.
- Fleas are responsible for symptoms in cats mainly from spring to autumn. Even if there are no adult fleas found on the cat, flea infestation cannot be entirely



- ruled out because cats are very skillful in licking them away.
- House dust and storage mites, moulds (perennial allergens) and food ingredients can cause allergic symptoms year-round.
 - If the cat sleeps in the bedroom and is suffering from allergic reactions to house dust mites, we often see worsening of the symptoms, because the highest concentration of house dust mites is found in human bedrooms.
 - If the cat is suffering from food hypersensitivity, signs occur when the causative food ingredient(s) are fed. Sometimes it is possible to detect a direct correlation between feeding and clinical signs. On the other hand, signs can also appear delayed many days after feeding the causative food component. Changing

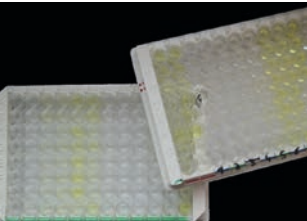


from one food source or company to another usually does not decrease the clinical signs.

A thorough analysis of the environment of your cat by your veterinarian is the first important step in diagnosing an allergy.

How to rule out other differential diagnoses?

Due to the fact that other diseases can also be responsible for pruritus or skin lesions, your veterinarian will try to rule these out systematically by performing various clinical or laboratory tests. Depending on the clinical signs and their location, your veterinarian will decide which tests are necessary. Swabs, cytology, or hair samples are often taken to detect bacteria or yeasts. Skin scrapes are used to identify ectoparasites. For further testing, skin biopsies can be taken and submitted to a specialised laboratory. Some diseases can be diagnosed using serological blood tests. If all other differential diagnoses have been ruled out, your veterinarian will take further steps for allergy diagnostics.



What kind of allergy tests are available?

Basically, you have to differentiate between two test procedures:

Intradermal test/skin test

Several different allergens (pollen, house dust mites, a.s.o.) are injected directly into the skin of your cat. The reaction of the skin (wheal) is evaluated and indicative for an allergy to the respective substance.

Serological test/ blood test

Some allergies induce allergen-specific antibodies that can be detected in a serological blood test. These antibodies are detected in the cat's blood, so for this type of test your veterinarian will take a blood sample and submit it to a specialised laboratory (Laboklin) for analysis. Not every test is feasible for every case, and your veterinarian will have to decide which test is suitable for your cat.



A special case: Food hypersensitivity

The diagnosis of food hypersensitivity can be challenging, because the gut-associated immune system has many different ways to respond to allergens. The “gold standard” for diagnosis is a rigorous elimination diet. This requires 100 % compliance and discipline from the cat's owner and is especially difficult to perform in households with several cats, fussy cats, cats with outside access, small children or elderly people who may not always be disciplined enough to stick to the diet.

To diagnose and treat food hypersensitivity, it is crucial that the feeding plan, which your veterinarian has determined for your animal, has to be closely followed for about 8 weeks and that the cat has no access to other food sources. Your veterinarian will advise you to either use a commercially available diet or prepare the food yourself (home cooked diet). If the signs disappear during feeding of the elimination diet, it can be assumed that one of the ingredients from the previous food was causing the clinical symptoms. After a thorough elimination diet, the original food has to be fed

again (provocation). If the signs reappear, an allergy against one or more ingredients of this food is proven.

It is also possible to detect allergen-specific antibodies (IgE and IgG) against food ingredients in a blood sample. This serological food allergy test is very helpful, especially if you and your veterinarian are trying to compose the new diet for your cat that contains all essential substances but no allergens. We recommend feeding those ingredients (one carbohydrate and one protein source) which have shown negative reactions in both antibody classes (0/0). There are also adverse reactions to food that are not based on antibody reaction, thus the blood test is not suitable to determine this type of food intolerance. In such cases only an elimination diet – based on ingredients that never have been fed before – can lead to a correct diagnosis.

