

## 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 a 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, to which your cat has shown positive reactions in previous allergy testing, are prepared and administered subcutaneously. The treatment begins with gradually increasing concentrations and intervals over a longer period of time. In most cases, this treatment increases your cat's immune system tolerance

to the respective allergens. Improvements are often noticeable within a few weeks of starting treatment. However, in some cases, it can take longer (several months) before improvement is noticeable. Overall, **this type of therapy is effective in about 70% of cases, either reducing the severity of allergic signs or completely eliminating them.** In rare cases, side effects may be observed, such as a short-lived worsening of clinical signs. In most cases, your veterinarian can 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 manage an allergy and to improve your cat's quality of life is to identify the causative allergens, try to avoid them as much as possible and/or use an allergen-specific immunotherapy.

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

## Short overview

### → Allergy types

Flea allergy dermatitis, atopic dermatitis (caused by pollen, mites, moulds), 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

Skin problems and/or gastrointestinal disorders

### → ASIT

Allergen-specific immunotherapy



## Laboratory profile

Name:	LABOklin Labor für klinische Diagnostik GmbH & Co. KG
Office:	Bad Kissingen
Founded:	1989
Qualifications:	One of the leading laboratories in Europe
Operating in:	Europe, Asia, Arabian Peninsula
Team:	Over one hundred specialists and veterinarians
Specialty:	Research projects at the federal level

## Handed out directly from your vet



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# LABOKLIN

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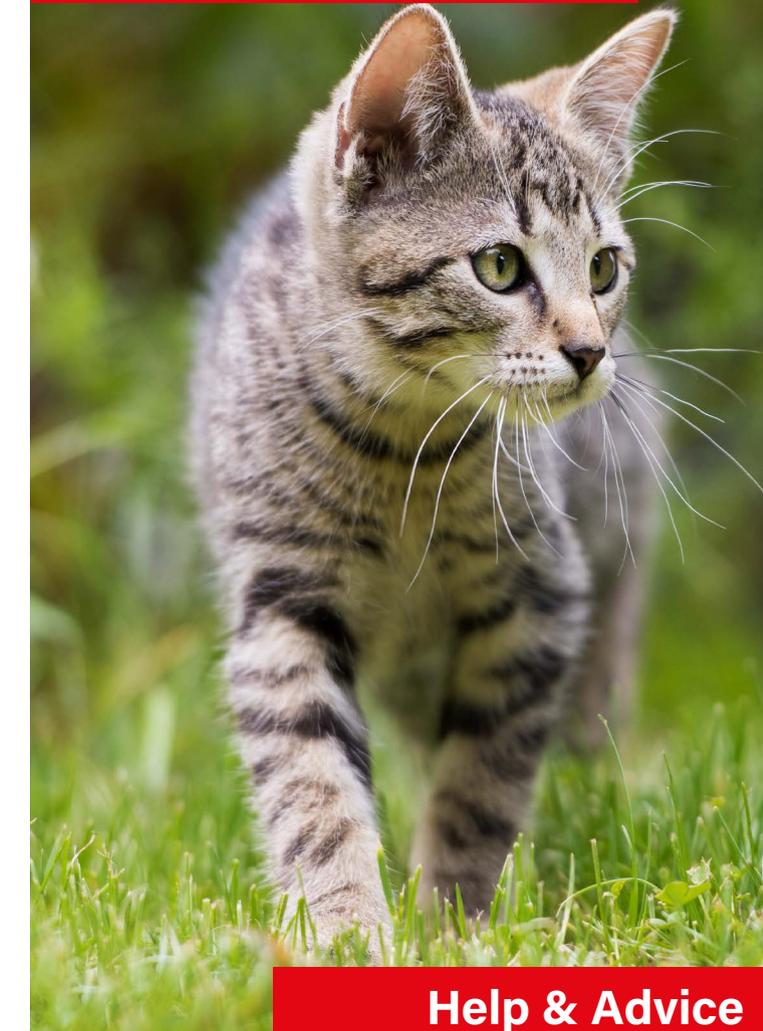


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# LABOKLIN

## Allergies in Cats



## Help & Advice

The modern information series provided by your vet and Laboklin

# Help & Advice

## How can you describe allergies?

An allergy – also called hypersensitivity – is a disease which can affect cats in many different ways. Essentially, an allergy is an overreaction 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**. However, allergies can also cause **allergic asthma**. The severity of allergic reactions 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): dermatological signs, pruritus, gastrointestinal 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 often severe **pruritus**. Cats use their rough tongue for "scratching", so pruritus in cats is often observed as increased grooming, resulting in biting and licking of the skin on various parts of the body. 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, tufts of hair can be found in places where the cat frequently sleeps.

- Most often, the owner observes **baldness/alopecia** on the abdomen, back, paws or other areas of the cat's body – depending on the reach of the cat's tongue. However, the skin in these areas 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, etc.)
- 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**), sometimes in addition to gastrointestinal problems (see above). Due to 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**.

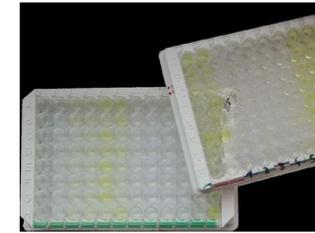


possible to detect a direct correlation between feeding and clinical signs. On the other hand, they can also appear delayed many days after feeding the causative food component. Changing from one flavour or food brand to another usually does not reduce the clinical signs.

A thorough evaluation of your cat's environment 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?

There are basically two types of 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 is indicative for an allergy to the respective substance.

### Serological test/blood test

Some allergies induce allergen-specific **antibodies** that can be detected through a serological blood test. These antibodies can be detected in the cat's blood, therefore, for this type of test, your veterinarian will take a blood sample and submit it to a specialised laboratory 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 very 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 implement in households with fussy cats or cats with outside access.

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

If the signs reappear, an allergy to 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 when you and your veterinarian are trying to compose a new diet for your cat that contains all essential nutrients but no allergens. We recommend feeding those ingredients 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; therefore, 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.

