

We welcome spring and summer back to Omaha after such a long hard winter! Along with the warmer weather, green grasses, budding trees and new growth around us, we also notice the pollen counts escalating. With that, seasonal allergies in dogs are on the rise.

Dogs have different allergic response than humans. When the human body is exposed to allergens, histamine is released in our mucous membranes and we start to sneeze, have runny itchy eyes and a runny nose. In animals, however, histamine is released in the skin, making it itch. The first area usually noticed will be when the animal begins to lick and chew on its feet. Other things can cause this, but allergies seem to be the most common. This allergic itching can occur anywhere on the body.

There are some basic treatment options for allergy symptoms:

The first is oral antihistamine. Just as in humans if the histamine response can be blocked in the first place, improvement in symptoms will be evident.

A second option is high levels of omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids, which have been shown to help reduce the clinical signs we see.

And if the itching is especially bad, steroid injection or tablets may be needed.

The only treatment that addresses the root of the problem is hypo-sensitization, also known as immunotherapy or allergy shots. The plan here is to expose the animal to the specific allergens they react to in very small quantities over time. Their body will develop an immunity that enables them to live in their environment without allergy problems. The only way to accomplish this is to give scheduled subcutaneous injections over time. On average it takes 4-6 months to bring noticeable relief to the animal.

To see how effective allergy shots were, a recent study looked at over 170 dogs, which were started on hypo-sensitization and followed for one year. At the end of the study period, the veterinarians were asked to score the patients with respect to level of improvement. Table 1 shows the results of the survey.

Note from the table that 85% of the patients showed more than a significant improvement in their symptoms from the hypo-sensitization/allergy shots after a year. Most commonly, this was defined by 'dramatic reduction' to 'complete elimination' of the need for other therapies such as corticosteroids and antihistamines.

**Table 1**

<b>Improvements</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
50-75%	91	54
>50%	18	11
Slight	4	2
No improvements	5	3
Worse	0	0

If your pet is suffering from allergies, please call our office and set up an appointment. We offer many options to help your suffering pet feel better, including hypo-sensitization.