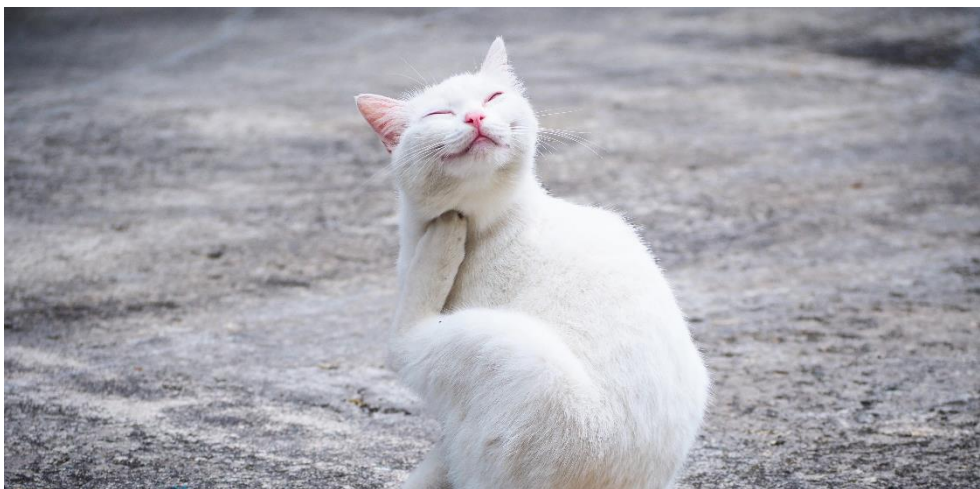


Skin allergies (atopy) in cats

Overview

- Atopic dermatitis (atopy) is a skin condition caused by an allergy to something in the environment (such as pollen, moulds, grass or dust mite).
- Atopy causes symptoms such as itchy, inflamed skin, a rash and fur loss.
- Atopy is quite an uncommon condition in cats so your vet will want to rule out other, more common causes of itchy skin before making a diagnosis.
- Atopy often causes a lot of distress and discomfort but with proper treatment, your cat will be able to live a long, happy life.
- Treatment for atopy often includes avoiding the things your cat is allergic to, medication to stop the itch and skin supplements.
- Contact your vet for an appointment if you notice your cat scratching more than usual, losing fur or developing a rash.

What is atopy?



Atopic dermatitis (atopy) is an allergy to things in the environment (such as pollen, moulds and dust mites). Atopy causes red, inflamed, itchy skin. Symptoms of atopy are often worst on the head, neck, sides,

tummy, armpits and inner thighs. Atopy can develop at any age and in any breed of cat, although it's more common in certain breeds such as the Abyssinian and Devon Rex. Atopy is a very common condition in dogs but quite rare in cats, so before diagnosing it your vet will want to rule out other, more common causes of itchy skin such as flea bite dermatitis.

Symptoms

Symptoms of atopy include:

- Itchy skin
- Over-grooming (licking, chewing, biting)
- Alopecia (hair loss) or hair thinning, especially on the head, neck, underbelly and inner thighs
- A rash
- Repeated ear infections
- Thickened skin

When to contact your vet

Make an appointment with your vet if your cat has itchy skin, or any of the symptoms above. Whatever the cause, itchy skin very rarely goes away in its own and is likely to make your cat sore and miserable.

What is my cat allergic to?

Atopy can be caused by many things, including pollen, dust mites, moulds. Blood and skin tests can be used to find out exactly what your cat is allergic to, but beforehand, your vet will want to rule out other more common causes such as a food allergy or flea bite allergy. Skin testing is more reliable than blood testing, and for this, your vet may refer your cat to a dermatologist. Cats with atopy are very often allergic to more than one thing i.e. certain foods as well as something in environment. It can be helpful to find out what your cat is allergic to. However, it's not easy and doesn't often change the treatment they need. Speak to your vet about the pros and cons of allergy testing.

Treatment

If your cat has atopy, they will need lifelong treatment to manage their condition. There are three main ways to treat atopy:

- **By avoiding their triggers**
- **Medicines to control itchy skin**
- **Immunotherapy/vaccination treatment**

Avoid allergy triggers. In an ideal world, we would prevent the symptoms of atopy by preventing the allergic reaction from happening in the first place. Unfortunately, if your cat is allergic to something in the environment, this is often impossible. However, it is possible to reduce the amount they are exposed to the things they are allergic to by:

- Vacuuming and dusting regularly
- Not letting them outside when the pollen count is high
- Not using air fresheners and other sprays in the home

Medical treatment. Another way of managing atopy, is to control its symptoms i.e. inflamed, itchy skin. This doesn't solve the root cause of the problem (the allergy) but is a good way to manage the symptoms. Your vet may recommend the following medication:

- **Steroids.** Steroids are excellent at settling sore, itchy skin. They are cheap and effective but often cause side effects when used over a long period. Speak to your vet for more information.
- **Other 'anti-itch' medication.** There are other anti-itch medications available besides steroids, they all vary in how effective they are, their price and side effects. Speak to your vet for more information.
- **Antibiotics.** Antibiotics may be necessary if your cat develops a skin infection because of severe atopy.
- **Ear drops.** Your cat may be prescribed eardrops if they develop an ear infection as a result of atopy.

Immunotherapy. If your cat has undergone testing to find out what they are allergic to, they can be given tailor-made vaccines

(immunotherapy) to reduce the reaction they experience. Immunotherapy vaccines need to be given regularly throughout your cat's life and can take weeks to months to take effect. Unfortunately, immunotherapy doesn't work for every cat and medication is often still needed to reduce symptoms such as itchy skin.

Skin supplements. Skin supplements aim to improve skin health, they help some cats but not others. You can buy skin supplements from your vet practice, pet shops and online.

Prescription diet. Your vet may recommend a special diet to keep your cat's skin as healthy as possible.

Cost

Treatment for atopy can become very expensive over a cat's lifetime. It's important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your cat. There are often several treatment options so if one doesn't work for you and your pet then your vet may be able to offer another. Think about insuring your cat as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start, so you have all the support you need to care for them.

Find out whether you are eligible for free or low cost PDSA veterinary treatment using our checker below or visit www.pdsa.org.uk/eligibility

Outlook

Having constantly itchy, sore skin can make a cat very miserable, but with a successful long-term treatment plan in place your cat can live a long and happy life. Your cat may have 'flare-ups' from time to time but by working closely with your vet you will be able to catch and treat their symptoms quickly.

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