



# Western Hills Animal Hospital

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## ALLERGIES IN OUR PETS; IT'S A FACT OF LIFE

By Robert R. Brenneman, DVM

Twenty some years ago our instructors at vet school told us that the number one reason we would see pets, aside from routine vaccinations, would be for allergies. How boring I thought. I was in vet school to treat disease and pestilence; save lives, mend broken bones and perform radical surgeries. Many of my classmates, as well as I, hoped that this prediction from our professors would prove to be wrong. The reality was, and still is, they were right. Statistically, one out of four dogs and one out of ten cats will have some sort of allergy issue. It's a fact of life.

Simply put, allergies are the result of the immune system doing its job too well. The immune system recognizes a foreign substance and mounts an antibody response to it. Too many antibodies or the wrong type of antibodies are produced and you then have an allergic response. Animals can be allergic to the same things we humans are: pollens, molds, insect stings, foods, medications, etc. Some of these allergens are year round, such as molds; others are seasonal like many grasses and weeds. Most allergy problems in animals will be exhibited with skin and/or ear disease. My dog is scratching all the time, she is shaking her head all the time, and he has sores on his back and under his legs.

Fall tends to be a season where we see more allergies than most of the other seasons. Fleas are at their highest numbers, grasses and weeds are pollinating prior to winter coming, furnaces are kicking on and blowing molds and dust mites through the ducts of our homes. Seventy-five percent of all allergies in pets are due to fleas; flea control is very important in all pets, especially ones with allergies. Topical products like Frontline and Advantage are the pinnacle of flea control. Newer topical products are coming out every day, some as good and some not. Ask your veterinarian what he/she recommends.

Other things that you can do to help prevent allergies or minimize their effects are supplementing your pets' diet with omega-3 fatty acids. These act as immune modulators and help in keeping the immune system in check. They also promote good skin health. Fish oil capsules are an excellent source of omega-3 and can be bought at most grocery stores and pharmacies. One capsule per 10 to 15 pounds of body weight per day, will go a long way in keeping your pet healthy. Omega-3 supplementation alone can eliminate 20-30% of your pets' allergy problems. All good pets should be on some sort of omega-3 supplement! There are other sources of omega-3 fatty acids so ask about them at your next visit with your veterinarian. Benadryl, at 25mg per 25 pounds of weight two to three times a day as needed, is an inexpensive antihistamine that will also help with allergy relief in some pets. In many pets antihistamine effect will be potentiated by as much as two fold with the concurrent use of an omega-3 supplementation. There are many other antihistamines, as well as other medications, that will also help, if Benadryl does not seem to be doing the trick for your pet.

These are a few recommendations that may help your pet to a better quality life. There are many other things to do to help your allergic pet if needed; remember you will have a lot of company!