

WHY DOES MY MASCOT SCRATCH?

The pruritus (itch) is one of the motives most frequently consulted at the veterinary clinic. One of the most probable reasons of the itch in dogs and cats are the allergies. Dogs and cats show pruritus (itches) when they scratch, lick, bite or rub the body against several objects.

These signs of pruritus can be continuous or intermittent, slight or intense, stationary (they only show on a certain period of the year), more intense outside or inside the house...

What is the allergy?

It is a disease genetically programmed that gives rise to an anomaly immune reaction when the animal is in contact with habitual substances in the environment such as pollens, mites, and food proteins...

These substances are called allergens, and they are able to cause allergy reactions, always inconvenient and sometimes very severe.

The possible ways of entry of the allergens are: inhalation, ingestion or by contact (across the skin).

It is important to know that not all the diseases with pruritus have an allergic origin, since the animal can show itches because of hormone problems, external parasites (fleas, mites...), infections by bacterium or fungus...

How does it happen?

The allergic animals, just like human beings, have a genetic tendency to suffer the disease (there are some predisposed breed). These animals after a continuous exposure to the responsible allergens during more or less long periods, begin to show the symptoms, of which the first and most obvious one is the scratching.

Frequently the first symptoms can be unnoticed, showed in some periods and as the disease goes on these are more obvious and stronger and they can last more time.

How does it start?

The Most frequent symptoms are:

- Intensive scratching of the face, ears, armpits, groins and anal zone
- Constant lick of the extremities (hands and feet)
- Rubbing the face (eyes and lips)
- Biting the dorso-lumb zone, tail, legs etc.
- Frequent otitis
- Injuries, scratch, etc, as a consequence of the scratching
- Darkness of the skin in the alopecia zones
- Less hair and without shine
- Bad smell
- Thicker skin
- Gastrointestinal alterations (vomits and diarrhoea) alternates or continues

Most of these symptoms are as well compatible with many other diseases that are not allergies, some of them even contagious for humans like the sarna sarcotic, so if our

pet shows some of these symptoms, we must go to the veterinary so he can achieve a correct diagnosis and get the correct treatment.

Most common allergies

- Atopic Dermatitis: It happens with the exposure to the environmental allergens that go through the animal by cutaneous or breathing way and produce the symptoms. It is a chronic disease that needs a good management of the veterinary and a great collaboration of the owner. The most frequent allergens are: dust mites, some tree pollens, and grasses...
- Food allergy: It is a disease produced by ingesting proteins inside the food and that produces an allergic reaction, with the same symptoms as in the atopic dermatitis. In some cases the food allergy can cause gastrointestinal symptoms, especially alternates or continuous diarrheas.
- Flea bite allergic dermatitis: In this case the allergen that produces the symptoms is the flea saliva, that produces the allergy reaction by biting.

It is important to consider that some allergic animals can present the symptoms as a consequence of combination of several allergies named above, and that can produce stronger symptoms and can difficult the diagnosis and control of the disease, so it is very important to put the case into the specialist hands so that they can evaluate the clinic history and achieve a complete study of the diagnosis.

How can we prevent the allergy?

Because of the genetic character of the allergy, there is no efficient way to prevent it, however, from the point of view of the theory, the control of the disease is based on the elimination of the environmental substances that produce it. For example: elimination of the fleas in the case of fleabite allergic animals or to move the animals to an environmental free of the allergen (some seasonal pollens). In the case of food allergies we must identify and avoid those components that caused the disease. Unfortunately in most of allergy diseases it is impossible to remove the causing agent (dust mite allergy, some pollens in the dog environment etc), so we must use medical treatments to control the symptoms.

How can we treat the allergy?

The treatment for the allergy must be established by the veterinary that usually take care of your animal or the specialist. The treatment must be individual and it will depend on several agents like: the severity of the process, the period of the year in which the animals presents the symptoms and the duration of them, the age of the animal etc.

To obtain a successful treatment of allergies we must considerate the following factors:

We have to identify the responsible allergens of the symptoms and administrate a specific treatment in each case

- Eliminate or decrease the presence of responsible allergens in the environment (this is very difficult in most cases)
- Establish the most adequate protocol for the treatment according to the veterinary
- Make a narrow and continuing collaboration with the owner in the administration of the treatment.

The only treatment that cures the allergy is the immunotherapy (or allergenic vaccine). This is prepared keeping in mind the clinical history of the animal, the positive allergens in the test, so it is an **individual treatment**. These allergens are administrated with a subcutaneous injection (under the skin), with increasing concentration in order to get in a medium – large period of time that the immune system of the allergic animal, get used to the contact with allergens, and stops reacting against them.