

## ATOPIC DERMATITIS

### WHAT IS ATOPIC DERMATITIS?

Atopic dermatitis is the term used to define allergy to environmental allergens in dogs. These substances can be grass or tree pollens, substances produced by microscopic mites, molds or animal and human dander. The predisposition for this disease, which typically develops between 6 months and 3 years of age, is hereditary.

### WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Animals suffering from atopic dermatitis present with itching of varying intensity, which may be localized in circumscribed areas such as the extremities of the limbs, muzzle, and ear pinnae, or spread throughout the body. The consequence of these continuous self-traumas is redness, hair loss, thickening and blackish discoloration of the skin and, in some cases, otitis.

Atopic dermatitis may begin as a seasonal problem and become year-round.

### DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of this allergy is clinical and is based on the presence of characteristic clinical signs and the exclusion of other pruritic skin diseases. The allergy testing is performed on the blood with the aim of identify specific allergens for an individual in order to formulate a serum of these allergens that is then given as an injection or administered by mouth to de-sensitize a pet to their specific allergy triggers.

### HOW TO TREAT

If your dog is atopic the only therapy that can change the course of the disease is desensitization (or hyposensitization). This consists of subcutaneous or oral administration of solutions containing the allergens to which the dog is allergic with the aim of inducing "tolerance" to these substances. The desensitization process needs time, so you cannot expect to see results until 4-6months after the start of therapy. Approximately 65% of animals show significant improvement in symptoms during the first year of administration. In all animals that respond positively to hyposensitization, it is advisable to continue for at least three years to achieve complete desensitization.

In combination with or instead of immunotherapy, we have several pharmacological options for the control of atopic dermatitis. Among the drugs used for this purpose in veterinary medicine, the most effective are lokivetmab, oclacitinib, steroids, and cyclosporine. All must be administered or prescribed by the veterinary doctor and their use requires regular medical supervision.

Other variously effective remedies include antihistamines, palmidrol and essential fatty acids. These drugs are able to partially control itching and can be combined with the main therapies

### OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

Dogs suffering from allergies are predisposed to develop bacterial (*Staphylococcus*) or yeast (*Malassezia*) skin infections. It may be necessary in such cases to wash the animal with antibacterial shampoos to control the problem. Secondary infections generally occur less frequently if an animal responds well to Allergen Specific Immunotherapy.