

Is your dog itchy? If so, join the club. A day doesn't go by at our office that we don't discuss an itchy dog or two. With the springtime just around the corner I thought a review of the itchy dog may help. First let's be clear. We're not talking about the occasional scratch that all dogs (and people) will do. After all, we're all entitled to scratch now and then. We're talking about the dog that chews, gnaws and scratches constantly. Sometime the scratching is enough to cause severe redness and even infection in the skin. These are the patients that show up at my door. These patients need help.

Itchiness, or pruritus as it's called in the medical world, can have many causes. Most pet owners suspect one thing: diet. While allergy to food ingredients is occasionally seen, it's not nearly as common as folks think. Some might even suggest it is rare. To diagnose a pet with food allergy one needs to feed a very special kind of diet called a "limited or novel antigen diet", and nothing else, for several weeks. The choice of which diet to try should be guided by your pet's veterinarian. Many diet manufacturers claim their diets are "hypoallergenic" but the diets are usually not appropriate as a diet trial for food allergy.

When a veterinarian sees an itchy dog we think of many possibilities depending on the pet's age, breed, lifestyle, and home environment. The itchiness may be due to skin parasites (especially if we're talking about a puppy), skin infections (bacteria and yeast), yes food sensitivity, or contact sensitivity where a pet is uniquely sensitive to something its skin comes in contact with. Despite the long list of possible causes, in reality itchy skin is most commonly caused by allergies.

Allergy is the immune system's way of saying it doesn't like something. Unfortunately, dogs like people can be allergic to a multitude of things in their environment ranging from pollens and molds to dust mites and grass. That said, Hay fever/Atopy looks a bit different in dogs. While sneezing and red runny eyes can be part of the syndrome as recognized in people, dogs will more commonly have very itchy skin; especially of the feet, face, ears, and armpits. Many dogs with Atopy will constantly lick their feet and have recurrent ear infections.

Noticeably missing from the discussion so far is any mention of fleas. Since the advent of products like Advantage and Frontline flea problems have been less severe. But don't think for a minute that they

Also important is where the pet is itchy