

Dog Allergy Glossary of Terms

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What did my veterinarian just say about allergies?



Learning your pet has allergies can take many animal lovers by surprise. When our veterinarian tells us our animal has a condition, however minor it may be, pet owners often get anxious and confused.

Trying to process all the information in front of us, we just nod our heads and wonder, walking back to the car after the appointment, why we didn't ask more questions.

The following is a list of terms veterinarians use - the ABC's of Allergies - which may help you understand your animal's newly diagnosed allergy condition:

General

- **A Disease** is when one of the body's systems, tissues or organs does not work as it is supposed to.
- **Chronic** means the disease or condition has been ongoing; your pet has had a long history or duration of the condition.
- **Acute** means the onset of the condition was sudden and that your pet has had the condition for a short time.

Diseases

- **A Sign** means any abnormality that indicates the presence of a disease. A sign is found by the veterinarian in his physical examination of your pet. For instance, a sign of atopy would be a reddening of your pet's skin.
- **A Symptom** is any abnormal function of the body or behavior indicating a disease process. An example of a symptom would be your pet scratching.
- **A Syndrome** is a combination of signs and symptoms that suggests a particular disease in the mind of a veterinarian.

Allergies

- **An Allergen** is defined as any substance capable of causing an allergic reaction.
- **An Allergy** occurs when any substance alters the response of your pet's body and immune system.
- **An Allergic Reaction** is a response of the pet's immune system, following the inhalation, ingestion, or injection of an allergen.
- **Atopy** is a specific type of allergic response to something your pet inhales, like pollen. It's also known as "allergic inhalant dermatitis."

Allergy Testing

- **RAST** is an acronym for radioallergosorbent test, a blood test that measures reactions to possible allergens.

- **ELISA** is an acronym for enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay test used to identify allergic reactions in the blood.
- **Intradermal** skin testing is when specific allergens are injected just under the pet's skin in a specific pattern to see which allergen your pet reacts to.

What is Hypersensitivity?

Hypersensitivity is a synonym for allergy that encompasses four types:

- **Type I** is an immediate reaction. For example, reactions to bee stings or penicillin. In animals, atopy, flea allergy dermatitis, and hives are also Type I sensitivities.
- **Type II** is when the body has a hypersensitivity to its own cells. It is also called autoimmunity. An example is autoimmune hemolytic anemia, when the body produces antibodies which destroy its own blood cells.
- **Type III** is in fact a severe version of Type II hypersensitivity. Antibodies attack cells in multiple body systems. An example is Lupus or Rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Type IV** is a delayed hypersensitivity. This reaction occurs more than 24 hours after the body is exposed to the allergen. Allergic contact dermatitis, or when your pet is allergic to chemicals, dyes, or metals, is an example of a Type IV hypersensitivity.