

The "Itchy & Scratchy" Show

Is your pet turning your house into the "Itchy and Scratchy" show? Does the jingle, jangle of pet tags keep you awake at night as your pet scratches feverishly at what itches him? Any pet owner who has a four legged companion with allergies or fleas knows what I am talking about. Now, however, there are preventative measures available that can give you and your pet relief.

Flea allergy is the most common allergy in dogs and cats. It causes severe itching. Some pets cannot tolerate even one flea bite and will itch for days. Fortunately, flea control products that only have to be given or applied once a month have revolutionized the fight against fleas and are saving pet owners considerable amounts of time and money. When using a good topical product such as Frontline Plus or Frontline Gold- and by "good," I mean safe for your pet and effective for the entire month at killing fleas- all a flea has to do is jump on an animal, and it will die without even have bitten your pet. Even more convenient is an oral product, such as Nexgard, that also is safe and kills fleas faster than any other preventative on the market...and it kills ticks, too. Nexgard tastes like a beef treat, which makes it very easy to give to your dog.

The products I have mentioned are available by prescription only from a veterinarian and while completely safe for animals, they are lethal to fleas and ticks, and continue to protect your pet for 30 days. There are other prescription products that also work, but these are the ones I use for my own pets. Similar, but very different over-the-counter products, as well as counterfeit and diverted products, can be found for sale in some stores and on the internet. These products can contain potentially harmful insecticides or, if counterfeit, they do not even contain an active ingredient. These types of products should be avoided.

Another common cause if itching is seasonal allergies to airborne pollens, spores and fungi. Some of these "aeroallergens" travel for miles and have been found as far as 200 miles out over the ocean! While many people sneeze and sniffle through the pollen seasons,

their pets may be scratching for the same reason. Seasonal allergies cause respiratory ills, such as hay fever in people, but in our pets, these inhaled allergens trigger itchy skin and result in scratching, licking and rubbing until their skin has scabs and raw spots. There are regional variations, but in the tropical setting of Southwest Florida, a pet may have year-round exposure and a year-round itch. Veterinarians can diagnose and treat these symptoms in a variety of ways. There are tests to narrow down the cause of the itching, and many treatments are available to alleviate your pet's suffering. Although inhaled allergies, known as atopy, are far and away the most common cause of itchy skin, there can be food allergies, as well. Treating a food allergy requires strict adherence to a diet provided by your veterinarian, so do not be fooled by false advertising of diets you can buy over the counter in pet stores and grocery stores.

Antihistamines do not work the same way in pets as they do in people and are rarely effective in alleviating the discomfort of itchy pets. Different types of cortisone, from pills to several injectable types, can help, but also frequently have adverse side effects. Clients have been asking for years if we have a pill that can help their allergic pet and finally, in the past few years, just such a "magic pill" has been brought to the market by a large pharmaceutical company. It is called Apoquel, and it is fantastic, providing instant relief to pets and making owners very happy.

Veterinarians also can recommend the best vitamins and supplements that unbiased research has shown to help prevent these allergic reactions and improve the health of your pet's skin and hair coat. Once again, do not be fooled by false claims on supplement labels, as government research has shown that up to 75 percent of supplements do not contain what their labels claim. If your pet is already itching or has developed scabs and raw spots, see your veterinarian for treatment, which can be followed up with preventative measures to avoid or minimize a recurrence in the future. And if your pet has fleas, call to inquire about the best and safest flea control products.