

# Treating Allergic Dogs and Cats Without Drugs

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## Introduction

Veterinarians who use homoeopathy and other natural therapies are finding that a large part of their work calls for the treatment of animals with allergies, particularly itchy or infected allergic skin conditions, for which these therapies are usually successful.

Most people have owned or known a pet animal that has suffered from an allergic skin condition and has required cortisone treatment to stop the animal chewing itself raw. A very occasional hit of cortisone is warranted to give relief while the cause is brought under control, if this is possible.

However, repeated or continuous use of cortisone is likely to weaken the animals immune system causing not only the drug to be less effective, but a variety of side-effects such as reduced liver and adrenal function, ending in illness and shortened lifespan. Symptoms of liver and adrenal stress are drinking excessive water, becoming depressed, overweight or bloated or getting frequent infections such as pancreatitis.

In some cases, antihistamines and essential fatty acids can reduce allergy but often are not dramatically effective. Dermatological desensitization injections can give good results in about 60% of cases but can take several months to work so the animal often needs to stay on cortisone in that time.

Happily, there are now significantly effective alternatives to this scenario.

## Natural Therapy Options for Treating Allergies

Natural Diet is generally recommended by holistic practitioners. If the animal is given the type of food that nature intended it to have, then it will be much easier for the animal's system to digest and process the correct nutrients in the optimal combinations for immune system health.

This approach to treating allergies is a cheap and easy thing the animal owner can do at home. We often have people phoning our clinic from distant country areas. Often, if we suggest a natural diet with adequate natural nutrient supplements, especially fatty acids, we can often solve their problem without the need to seek further professional help.

A natural diet can work in many cases at a simple level by removing from the diet such substances as colourings, preservatives and cereals which may be allergens, but also more importantly, allows a more effective uptake of nutrients such as fatty acids, zinc, selenium and many others which the immune system needs to function effectively. The more research is carried out into nutrition, the more we realise that nutrient uptake is a complex interrelationship between many components and factors of the food and the animal's physiology. Only nature really knows best so as close as we can get to a whole raw carcass, the more suited it will be to a carnivore's digestion.

The very act of a dog or cat chewing (or even growling and "attacking" ) raw meat and bone is thought to release endorphins and digestive processes which cause more effective digestion of food. Even the best quality dried and tinned dog foods on the market, although far better than the cheap ones, are not what nature intended dogs and cats to eat. Even though all nutrients may have been added and are listed on the side of the packet, they will not necessarily end up digested by the dog. Dried pet food is hard and cooked (for a long shelf life) and generally has a significant cereal content (cheap and again stores well). The problem is, dogs and cats eat only a small amount of cereal naturally, and they digest their nutrients best from not hard cooked food but sloppy, slimy, partly fermented gut contents of the carcasses they kill (mainly vegetable matter, very little cereal). In the

case of dogs, also from rotting fruit, berries and herbivore dung from the jungle floor; all highly rich in trace elements, vitamins and fatty acids in a highly digestible form. To take the place of these in a modern diet, a combination of kelp, yeast, dolomite, flax oil and fish oil added to the natural diet of meat, veges and fruit, will supply the missing and essential nutrients. There are several ready-made products which are easier and often cheaper than making your own which can be bought from most vets, health food shops and pet supply shops, such as Missing Link, Miracle Mix and Powerblend.

To save you cooking especially for the dog, just keep a bowl on the kitchen sink. In it goes your left over muesli, fruit, low-fat yoghurt and cheese, egg, porridge, veges, salad, bruised fruit from fruit bowl, sultanas, over-ripe bananas and any other healthy left-overs. You can cook up lentils, beans, sweet potato, ordinary potato, carrots, spinach, broccoli, cauli, zucchinis etc. or better still pulp raw any of the above. Then add raw meat and offal, the kelp, oil etc. or a spoonful of the complete nutrient additives (as described above) and serve. A raw chicken wing or neck or raw lamb shank etc for a small dog or cat several times a week, or if you cannot find a raw meaty bone the animal will chew up thoroughly and safely, then a large raw marrow bone once a fortnight for a larger dog, will keep the teeth clean but not over-wear them, with dairy/soy products for calcium intake to replace not ingesting bone. Traditional Chinese medicine observes the fact that people and animals with certain personality types or with certain symptoms can benefit from specific balancing foods, which may help when choosing the meats, vegetables or fruits to be used. For example, very skittish, scattered animals would be better with beef, which comes from the slow, grounded cow, rather than chicken meat which comes from a skittish and scattered chook! Hot skin conditions, which feel hot or are worse in hot weather or require cooling to settle the animal's itching, would benefit from cooling foods such as melons, grapes and salad rather than warming foods such as cooked vegetables. (For more on this see Cheryl Schwartz's book "Four Paws Five Directions," an excellent book on Chinese medicine for pet owners.) Obviously, we all know healthy looking animals who eat tinned and dried pet food, but their digestions are very efficient. Some animals may, therefore, manage fine on processed food or a combination of raw or cooked or processed. It is important that the diet suits the individual animal, regardless of theory, and also that the pet owner is not stressed or resentful of preparing their pet's food ( animals are very sensitive to emotions – for more on this read Laura Esquivel's book "Like Water for Chocolate"! ). So for prevention, or especially if health problems are present on a processed food diet, then swapping to a natural diet is highly recommended in most cases.

**Homoeopathy** is the prime natural modality for treating chronic (long-term) skin conditions and other allergic symptoms. Choosing exactly the right remedy from the many hundreds possible is a fine art. A homoeopathic veterinarian or homoeopath experienced in treating animals is likely to successfully treat most cases.

Homoeopathy is the use of a highly diluted medicine which would in higher concentration actually cause the same symptoms that are to be treated. They work by gently nudging the immune system into healing itself of those same symptoms.

A homoeopathic remedy in general does not contain any of the original substance so cannot be toxic; the remedy works because the energy field or magnetic field or "fingerprint" of the substance is retained bound to the water molecule during the making of the remedy, which is achieved by shaking or "succussing" the solution.

(The presence of this energy field can be seen by placing a leaf on photographic film in the sun and observing the "aura" around the leaf left on the film).

For example, homoeopathic salt, highly diluted or "potentised", actually helps treat any symptoms similar to those that would be produced by an overdose or excess of salt, such as thirst and excessive water drinking, weakness, dry, itchy skin with hair loss and eventually anaemia or kidney failure. So some animals with a skin allergy and cortisone side-effects may fit these symptoms, as

may an old cat with kidney failure with all these symptoms, so both may be improved with a homeopathic remedy made from salt, even if the cause of the problem has nothing to do with eating salt, and the disease processes causing the same symptoms are different. It is the symptoms only that are important, regardless of what caused them. The remedy needs to fit as accurately as possible the list of symptoms of the patient, including personality, past diseases, emotions and physical symptoms.

The homeopathic consultation will therefore consist of asking the owner to provide many details about the animal's personality, liking for different foods, habits and what makes the symptoms better or worse, so the owner who knows the pet best should be the one to attend the consultation. This is therefore a much deeper, more thorough and more individualized treatment than just giving the same conventional drugs to all patients.

Often, it will be noticed in the homeopathically treated patient that they feel a lot better in themselves, behaviour often improves and other "unrelated" symptoms also resolve because the treatment is balancing and strengthening the whole body into curing itself instead of relying on a drug to just suppress certain symptoms.

Most owners find homeopathics are usually very easy to administer to their pets. In liquid form in a dropper bottle, a few drops can be placed against some gum or inside the floppy lower lip. If in small pillule form, these can be tipped into the mouth, or crushed between two teaspoons and the powder tipped into the mouth. It is generally not appropriate to give homeopathics in food, although some lower potency remedies can be put in the water bowl if about one third at least of the water is drunk daily. Homeopathics are usually prescribed for a short time only. As soon as a response is seen, the remedy should be stopped to encourage the body to take up the responsibility of healing itself, which is, after all, the object of the treatment. Healing may continue for several weeks after the last dose. A new remedy is only given when healing has stopped before progressing fully, or symptoms have changed and a new remedy is needed. An average case usually needs only one or two visits over a month or so to the vet or homeopath. At our clinic, if no significant results are achieved with homeopathy, we look for;

- an emotional cause (see Flower Essences below), or;
- to detoxify and strengthen the immune system if cortisone has been used prior to the treatment (see Herbs below); or
- we use kinesiology to diagnose and desensitize the animal to specific allergens (see NAET below). This method is particularly the treatment of choice for respiratory or digestive allergies, but has a high success rate for skin allergies too.
- acupuncture is a good option for respiratory and digestive allergies but not so good for skin allergies.

**Herbs** can be very useful as a drug alternative, especially for animals whose systems are reliant on, and weakened by, long-term cortisone use, and are not yet vital enough to benefit from homeopathics.

Many herbalists would use only herbs to treat skin.

I have found that particularly Chinese herbs can give a powerful and long-lasting effect even with a 2-4 week course, but it is essential that an individual and thorough Chinese diagnosis is made by a qualified practitioner for that individual animal, as Chinese herbs can be very powerful. The Chinese theories on different food types for individuals would fit in very well here.

Ayurvedic (Indian) herbs are gentler than Chinese herbs but can be very good for detoxification from drugs and again fit the personality and body type of the individual patient. They contain some common culinary herbs and spices such as pepper, coriander and tumeric, so lend themselves to

incorporation with diet on an ongoing basis without much fuss. They do still need practitioner prescription to type the patient to start off with. (We are using these herbs increasingly in my clinic).

Traditional herbs, such as clivers, nettle, burdock, dandelion, licorice and St. Mary's thistle are easy to obtain, safe and are good for liver detoxification from drugs and to specifically treat the skin. Digestive allergies can be helped by slippery elm bark, agrimony, marshmallow, aloe vera and licorice. I find that other modalities, especially homoeopathy, are often needed to produce a long-term effect without the need for ongoing treatment, but are useful to use at the same time.

First-aid topical washes (to use until the problem responds to the internal treatments) are sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) baths, to which can be added ; lavender oil or tea, calendula (marigold) tea or tincture, chamomile oil or tea.

Some older animals may present with allergic skin conditions secondary to underlying kidney, adrenal or liver degeneration. In these cases, treating with specific herbs for these organs can then benefit the skin.

**Flower Essences** are useful in cases where a major cause of the unbalanced immune system is a stressful event or attitude. Counselling regarding management of an existing cause of stress can often help.

I often notice while taking the animal's history that the skin became worse after an emotionally upsetting event such as a car accident, another animal in the house dying, the owner separating from their partner etc. While homoeopathics are chosen with the emotions in mind (eg ignatia for after effects of grief, hepar sulph is associated with anger), sometimes we need flower essences or other therapies to deeply shift the emotional basis to a disease.

Flower essences are very dilute solutions of non-toxic flowers and are similar to homoeopathics in their great dilution and the fact that they work on the energy body initially, before having an effect on the physical body. There are many sets from different countries. The best known are the Bach flower remedies from England which have been in use since the 1930's. The practitioners at the Bach Centre, near Oxford, have a 90% success rate in treating physical ailments by using Bach Flower essences for the specific emotional imbalances present in the patient.

I use many different sets (Bach, Australian Bush, WA Living Essences, Himalayan etc) and often there will be an essence from four or five sets in one bottle for an animal's prescription.

A good example of a response to Bach flower remedies was a labrador I once treated that had developed excema of the feet and would not stop licking them. The dog was relentless and exhausting in trying to help his owner look after the new baby and would alert the owner when the baby was waking or crying, and would continually try and "help". Unfortunately the owner was under a huge amount of stress as her husband had recently died. I treated the dog with only a bottle of the following essences;

- Elm – for being overwhelmed with responsibility
- Vervain – for overstrain and hyperactivity
- Impatiens – for anxiety and impatience
- Red Chestnut – for overconcern for others

Within a few days, the dog stopped licking his feet. In this case, the rest of the dog's coat was normal, so diet was not so much an issue as the emotions.

Frequently we see, as in the case above, a correlation with the dog's and owner's emotional issues. In many cases it helps to point this out and much can be achieved with management of the situation rather than treating the animal which could be just a "symptom" of the family problem. In the above case, it would have been of more long term benefit to the whole household to get temporary help in

caring for the baby, because the dog was merely drawing attention to the fact that the owner was not coping.

Sometimes just talking about the whole picture can achieve more than prescribing remedies for the animal.

Other modalities such as reiki, psychic healing and kinesiology can help with diagnosis and treatment of such cases in a holistic or "big picture" way.

**Kinesiology**, especially NAET (Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Technique) is a very exciting new hands-on, totally drug free treatment which successfully treats allergy in about 80% of patients.

Kinesiology is a well known modality which involves measuring and strengthening the energy field of the body in order to improve health.

It is possible to detect if a substance weakens the energy field (and therefore is an allergen) by holding it against the patient and checking the strength of a particular muscle group, then rechecking without the substance to compare the difference. This is called Muscle Response Testing and in skilled hands is a very accurate alternative to conventional allergy testing and involves no needles or drugs.

A further technique has been developed by an American acupuncturist and chiropractor, Deborah Nambudripad, whereby it is possible to desensitize the body to the allergen by grounding the body's energy field using a simple chiropractic procedure while holding the allergic item in the body's energy field. This, in effect, conditions the body into being grounded or balanced in the presence of the allergen (instead of going into fright and flight or an unbalanced state which is what an allergic reaction is).

Normally, only about two or three allergens can be desensitized every five days or so. If the patient has a very long list of allergens, then it can take a few weeks to clear them all. It is possible with this therapy (unlike most other natural therapies) to keep the patient on cortisone until the allergens are cleared enough to reduce the need for them, although normally it is preferred to use the above natural therapies mentioned.

We use NAET (Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Technique) if homoeopathy, diet etc have not given good enough results, or if the patient cannot be withdrawn from cortisone at all. The really amazing thing about NAET is that it can desensitize to emotionally weakening sentences or thoughts, such as "I was the ugly puppy and I use my skin condition to keep me ugly" or "I am allergic to floor-cleaning products because my owner puts me outside when she cleans the floor and then I feel unwanted". We have had many dogs literally stop itching twenty-four hours after such sentences have been cleared using kinesiology. The notable thing about this method is that many allergens turn out to be in and around the house; not the normal things on standard dermatological injection or blood testing kits (which are generally only plant pollens or insects). Also there are often emotional associations to these substances which need to be cleared to get results, which cannot be done with desensitization injections.

There are thirty vets in Australia and New Zealand who have qualified in NAET and are listed on the web site: <http://www.vetnaet.com>