

# Frequently Asked Questions



## What are allergies?

An allergic reaction is one in which an individual reacts to a normal substance in the environment. These substances are called allergens and include pollens, molds, animal hair, house dust, fleas, foods and many more. Allergens cause reactions through skin contact, inhalation or ingestion. Allergic animals possess IgE antibodies to the specific allergens. These antibodies cause biochemical changes in the body which produce allergy symptoms.

## Why are my pet's symptoms worse sometimes than others?

Allergens are cumulative in their effect on animals. The more allergens an animal is exposed to at any one time increases the chance of allergy symptoms, as well as the extent of the reaction. The easiest way to picture this 'threshold' phenomenon is to think of drops of water in a bucket, sooner or later the bucket will overflow, much as the immune system 'overflows' beyond its threshold. For this reason, time of a symptom's onset is not necessarily an indication of what the animal is allergic to. An animal with food and pollen allergies may only show symptoms in the summer (pollen count at its highest) because the pollens push it over the threshold.

## What about treatment?

The best form of treatment for allergies is avoidance for the offending allergens. In most cases, this is not possible. Steroid drugs are often used for a short-term relief of symptoms, but prolonged use of steroids can have serious side effects. Hyposensitisation (allergy shots) is another alternative. In this case, treatment sets are formulated specifically for your patients based on their allergy test results. The treatment (injections) are given in increasing concentrations. This builds up tolerance of the animal to the offending allergens so it can live more comfortably in its environment, without the worry of side effects.

## How effective is this form of treatment?

Some allergy symptoms dissipate with time and treatment. In other cases animals may require continued 'allergy shots' to maintain tolerance to the allergens in question. With adherence to the treatment schedule, one can expect an excellent chance of elimination of or reduced dependence on steroid drugs. Improvement in most cases is seen after 3-5 months of treatment, at which stage shots are given monthly.

## Is it necessary to take patients off suppression therapies such as Antihistamines, Cyclosporine or Steroids, in order to get accurate allergy testing results?

No. We test and measure the IgE the patient produces that is specific to the allergens we test for.

## How do suppression therapies work?

Antihistamines work by reducing or blocking the binding of histamine to its receptor, so that should an overstimulation occur because of mast cell activation, the symptoms will be minimised. Cyclosporine works as an allergy symptom reducer by suppressing the immune response not just to allergens but to all immune functions including those that fight off other, more serious ailments. Steroids work to reduce allergy symptoms by reducing the amount of immune system mediators produced by both B and T cells as well as mast cells.

## Why allergy test?

As you can see in each of the scenarios above, suppression therapies do just that, they suppress the immune system. They never actually address the root cause of why the patient is reacting and some of them come with pretty serious side effects. That is why, when given all of the facts, most owners opt to allergy test and treat with plant-based, safe for long term use, allergy management.

## What about food allergies?

Since dogs and cats cannot be hyposensitised to foods, elimination is the only form of treatment in the case of food allergies. We have been successful in treating food allergies by recommending the avoidance of anything that has a reaction when tested. Should your patient (pet) test positive to foods, Spectrum Labs will supply a list of commercially available foods free from the ingredients to which your pet tested positive.

## Why allergy injections?

As you know, there is no cure for allergies. Since it is unrealistic to avoid all the things your pet reacts to, we turn to hyposensitisation or allergy injections to help manage their allergies and allergic outbreaks (symptoms) in place of other drugs to mask the symptoms and cause harmful side effects.

## What is hyposensitisation?

Hyposensitisation can be defined as the process of increasing your pet's tolerance to those allergens to which it tested positive. It is important to realise that allergies are not "cured" in the traditional sense of the word. Instead we inject small, controlled amounts of the offending allergen just under the skin. This type of exposure will retrain your pet's immune system to deal with future exposure to the allergens and reduce or eliminate its symptoms.

## I don't like injections, isn't there any other way to give the allergen?

While we can certainly appreciate that most people don't enjoy giving or getting injections, in most cases all your pet is going to feel is the minor pinch that comes from the tenting of the skin. The relief your pet is likely to experience far outweighs this minimal discomfort.

## How long until I see improvement?

Unlike previous medications you may have used, hyposensitisation is a long-term process. You and your veterinarian have opted to go this route because of its effectiveness (up to 90%), safety, and absence of harmful side effects. Vials A & B are geared towards increasing your pet's tolerance to the offending allergens. It is usually by Vial C that you can expect to see improvement (3-5 months), but this can vary from pet to pet. Some animals show response a lot sooner, and yet others take longer to reach the same endpoint.

## How long will my pet need allergy injections?

Hyposensitisation is an allergy management system that is usually required for life since allergies are a lifelong problem. As your pet's threshold (tolerance) increases, the time between injections will also increase. After approximately 5 months you will be giving injections once a month.

## What side effects should I expect?

While side effects are uncommon, the most reported include increased itching and/or redness. On very rare occasions animals may develop symptoms such as hives, vomiting, diarrhea or lethargy. In most cases, if the increase in symptoms are related to the hyposensitisation they will occur within the 48 hours following an injection and are easily reversed.

## What should I do if symptoms get worse or return?

Don't panic! Simply discontinue the allergy injections and call your veterinarian. Make sure to have the following information for them:

1. The date of the last injection.
2. Dosage amount.
3. Colour of the vial (green, blue or red).
4. What the reactions are/were.
5. How soon after the injections the symptoms occurred.



## I have two sets, why? How does the administration of the two sets differ from one set?

In some cases pets have too many reacting allergens to fit into one set and still be effective, therefore we must break them up into two separate sets. We do this to ensure each allergen is absorbed properly so that the maximum effect can be achieved. **If you have two sets, please give one injection from each set at the same time at different sites of the body.**

## What should I do if I miss an injection?

You should make every effort to adhere to the schedule; however a day or two either way will not make a major difference, especially once the injections are spaced further apart. If it has been more than a few days please contact your veterinarian with the following information:

1. The date of the last injection.
2. Dosage amount.
3. Colour of vial (green, blue, red).
4. How the animal was doing prior to stopping.
5. The reason for stopping.

## When should I order a refill?

After the last dosage is given, contact your veterinarian to have new extract made. It usually arrives within 10 working days, giving plenty of time before the next injection is due.

## When is the best time to give my pet their injection?

Give your pet his/her injection at a time when you can observe them for 1 hour after the injection and after he/she has been fed and exercised.

## I have left the treatment set(s) out of the fridge, what should I do?

In most cases allergen vials left out of the refrigerator are still going to be good for use. Guidelines to determine if your vials are OK to continue administering:

1. Place vial back into the refrigerator for 24-48 hours before another injection.
2. Once cold, visually inspect them to ensure the extract is clear (not cloudy) and free of particulates (nothing floating after shaking). Please note that all vials will be a different shade of yellow and this is not classed as cloudy.
2. When shaking the vials, remember that bubbles float, particulates sink.
3. If the allergenic extract is clear and free of particulate it is safe to use; if it is cloudy or there is any particular matter please contact your veterinarian for a replacement vial(s)