



Pollen Pesters Pets

Can pets have allergies? Veterinarians are frequently asked this question. The answer is a definite yes. When we think of allergies in people, visions of sneezing and itchy, watery eyes come to mind. Although these allergic symptoms may occur in pets, more frequently pets suffer from problems relating to their skin: itching and inflammation. Some pets can develop such severe pruritis (itching) that they will scratch, chew, and lick until the hair is gone and the skin has multiple sores that may become infected.

What causes allergies to develop? Allergies are the result of an inappropriate reaction of the immune system to some substance in the environment. The substance can be eaten, contacted by the body, or even inhaled. Allergic reactions can range from relatively mild to severe and may even be life threatening. What can we do to help a pet who is an allergy sufferer? There are only three options available.

First, stay away from the offending substance. This is simple in theory but not

always easy to achieve for a pet. A person with a peanut allergy may be able to avoid this popular snack. However, how does a dog with an allergy to grass avoid exposure? It is hard to imagine a pet being happy about living in a bubble, isolated from the world!



Second, we can treat the symptoms. If a fire is burning, one should attempt to put it out. This is how most of us deal with our minor allergy symptoms. An antihistamine or decongestant can make the pollen season more bearable. The same is true for pets. If Fluffy's allergy to pine pollen is causing her

to lick herself bald, an anti-itch medication can bring relief. However, one must keep in mind that in treating the symptoms of allergies we are only putting out the fire...not catching the arsonists who started the fire.

Also, most medications have potential adverse side effects and must be used under careful doctor supervision.

Fortunately, some allergies can be cured. You may know an allergy sufferer who has grown tired of feeling miserable and went to get help from a specialist. The allergist first tested the individual to establish exactly what agents were causing the problem. Then, the doctor was able to offer "desensitization," a process of attempting to build up resistance in the immune system against the offending substances. This same procedure can be used for pets.

There are animal allergy specialists that can provide this service for our companions. Testing and desensitization is certainly the best of the three options as the end result is a potential cure. If you feel your pet may suffer from allergies, have your veterinarian provide an exam and further information.

Staff News

The End of an Era...

It is with a heavy heart that we bid a fond farewell to our Hospital Manager, Ray Griffin. Ray has been with Shoal Creek Animal Clinic



since we opened our doors six years ago. All who know Ray appreciate the way he has embodied our practice philosophy: to offer the best veterinary care possible and to be a servant to our patients and their owners.

Ray's kindness, care, and love of both animals and people has always been an inspiration. These qualities, combined with his exceptional skills as a veterinary technician have made him an invaluable asset to Shoal Creek Animal Clinic. In June Ray will be taking a position with Merritt Veterinary Supply and providing his knowledge and support to veterinary hospitals across Georgia. It is an understatement to say we will miss Ray. He has been an integral part of the growth and success of the clinic and a true friend to the clients and staff. Please join us in wishing him the very best in his new career.

More Staff News

Welcome!

In December, we welcomed our new receptionist, **Anne Askren**. Anne is the mother of six and grandmother of seven. She did not have many pets growing up and says that aside from having one German Shepherd and 18 (originally 3) hamsters, rearing her children consumed most of her time. Anne

says now that her children are all grown, she enjoys being owned by her two cats, Mimi and Tom. Anne shares, "One of the pleasures of working at Shoal Creek is meeting all kinds of different animals and their owners. I find that those who bring their pets to the vet are especially kind, caring and interesting people. Working here is an adventure!"

Farewell...

Two more valued staff are making changes in their lives.

Andrea Dorman, who has been with us for three years, has announced her plans to move to Wichita, KA. Her husband, Erle, has received a promotion with Haverly's. Andrea, Erle, and their ten month old daughter, Bailey, will be moving in June.

Having completed her Animal Science degree at UGA, **Janet Raymond** has left her position as a part time technician. Janet will be working with special education students at an Equine facility in Georgia which she helped design. This summer is also special for Janet as June 28 is her wedding day!

Atticus

What a tremendous bond we can form with our pets. The relationship is often as deep as that between parent and child. This has never been greater for me than this past month. A stray dog was brought in to be spayed. It appeared she was in heat or early pregnancy. I dislike performing spays on pregnant animals but consider it a necessary evil. It is certainly more humane than someone dumping a litter of unwanted puppies in a plastic bag at the land fill. During surgery I discover she was indeed pregnant and it was full term! Surprisingly, there was only one puppy. As I worked, I tried not to think about that little life slowly fading away. Then, the little one kicked! I tried to concentrate on completing the surgery. But, it kicked again. I couldn't do it! I switched gears and started a cesarean. In a few moments we had a squeeling little mixed breed wanting his first meal!

Thus, Atticus entered the world. The stray's new owner did not want anything to do with a puppy. So, my wife and I had a new mouth to feed. Hand raising a puppy from the womb is quite a job. Until doing so, one does not realize how much work a mother dog has...and she usually is dealing with eight to twelve puppies. Over time our "boy" got on a schedule we could manage without being too

exhausted. As we nursed him, cleaned him, changed his bedding...the bond began to grow. He really was our child...in a way that none of our other pets have ever been.

At the end of his second week of life, I had the impression he was not using his rear limbs properly. X-rays revealed a broken leg. How could this be? I took the x-rays to a friend who is a radiologist at the Veterinary College. "Ralph, this fracture is pathological not traumatic," he said. "In fact, there are other areas which are developing problems." Frantically, I began consulting with nutritionists, internists, pediatric specialists, and others. After talking with a dozen specialists I had a dozen opinions on what might be happening. The best possibility was a nutritional deficiency in the formula we were using. If I could get Atticus on a good diet and he could recover from his lesions, perhaps he would be able to live a full and happy life. I was determined I would save my "child."

I repeated the x-rays a few days later and discovered his other rear leg had broken over the weekend. Now, I could clearly see the evidence of poor mineralization in his other bones on the x-rays. The problem was getting worse! At 1:30 AM, we awoke to the sound of Atticus screaming. We found him unable to use his right forelimb and I could easily feel bone slipping against bone.

Another fracture! Despite every attempt at comforting him, his screams continued. I just couldn't let him continue to suffer. His little body was simply breaking under its own weight. It was not until we took him to the clinic and sedated him that he was free of discomfort. Crying like a baby, I administered the lethal injection to end his suffering.

Having raised him from birth and meeting his every need, we became extremely bonded to Atticus. His loss has affected me deeply. I hate so much that I was powerless to save him. However, as painful as the decision to put him to sleep was, I know it was the right one. As I reflected upon his time in this world, I wondered if I made the right decision in bringing him into it. Then I thought about the tremendous joy, excitement, and hope he brought to me, my family, and the staff. I realized that the tragedy of his short and painful life should never deter us from always striving to save life, nurture it, and work diligently to alleviate pain and suffering. In a way, Atticus represents all that we stand for in my profession.

On his three week birthday, Atticus was laid to rest at the foot of a young magnolia next to other dear departed companions. He will be missed just as much as those we knew for many years.

-Dr. Askren

Degenerative Joints

Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD) is a common problem in dogs. DJD may be the result of age, prolonged stress, injury, or congenital disease. Changes usually occur slowly and progress over years. These changes decrease optimal functioning of the skeletal joints dramatically affecting a pet's level of activity and mobility, including such routine tasks as rising from a sitting position or climbing and descending stairs. Although these disabilities affect pets of all ages and breeds, they are most pronounced in older and larger dogs. The degenerative processes can not be stopped once they begin. However, research indicates the progressive destruction of joints can be slowed and the associated pain relieved by providing proper medication. Many new products are now available. These products may consist of one or more of the following compounds.

Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) reduce pain and inflammation. They can be upsetting to the gastrointestinal system and must, therefore, be given with food.

Glycosaminoglycans (GAGS) are considered protective agents that help in the rebuilding of damaged connective tissue and provide lubricating properties to joint fluid protecting joint surfaces.

Glucosamine is a nutrient necessary for the production of key connective tissue components. It is used by the body for natural production of Glycosaminoglycans.

Vitamins and minerals aid in the protection of cell membranes and inhibit the activity of harmful free radicals.

Fatty Acids can decrease the clinical signs of inflammation and are considered to be essential for cell membrane integrity and function.

Amino Acids are essential to the synthesis of cartilage being necessary for collagen production and proteoglycan synthesis.

The good news for older pets showing signs of Degenerative Joint Disease is there are now many more treatment options. For most, these medications hold the promise of comfortable golden years. Talk to your veterinarian about which medications would be best for your pet.

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