

"ALLERGIC SKIN DISEASES" by Lowell Ackerman, DVM

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Comments in italics are the reviewer's and not Dr. Ackerman's.

(All Dalmatian breeders and owners should memorize this article! It is perhaps the most thorough and definitive one on the subject I've read in recent years, and is written in terms understandable to non-vet readers. It supports what I've personally suspected for some time, namely that many if not most of Dalmatians' skin problems start out with an allergic reaction. If you can "break" the chain reaction early enough, I believe a lot of resulting complications of the allergic reaction can be aborted before they take hold, such as infections, loss of hair, and scar tissue.)

Dr. Ackerman cites the two most common types of dog skin allergy excluding that due to fleas: 90 percent of them are called "allergic inhalant dermatitis" or AID (in humans, called "hay fever" or "atopy") and the remaining 10 percent due to food allergy.

Airborne pollens are breathed in ("inhalant") by humans allergic to them and induce reactions within their breathing system such as the sneezing of hay fever.

Dogs, he explains, breathe in the airborne allergens which do not cause sneezing as in humans but instead CREATE ITCHING. The allergic symptoms include the dog scratching, chewing or biting generally at their feet but also at sites all over the body especially armpits, groin and flanks. Recurrent ear infections also are a very frequent result of AID, he says.

(The "chain" reaction: if the allergy-induced itching is left untreated or not noticed, the uninterrupted scratching and biting ultimately breaks the protective surface of the skin. Bacteria then invade those openings creating a "secondary" skin infection superimposed atop the allergic reaction. The skin infection, *in*

turn, aggravates the itching sensation so that an itch-scratch-infection-itch cycle occurs.)

(Dals with AID will show symptoms at various times and for various durations. If they are allergic only to one or two species of "hay fever plants" (certain trees, grasses, weeds), they will itch seasonally only when those plant species are blooming and pollinating. If they are allergic to many species of trees and of grasses and of weeds whose pollinating cycles overlap, the itching can extend for months or even most of the year.)

Molds and house dust are other airborne allergens creating itching in dogs, Dr. Ackerman notes. High humidity seems to be an aggravating factor (*allergic Dals do better in dehumidified air-conditioning...*). In terms of heredity, he suggests AID will be passed on if both dam and sire have them, food allergy not.

AID can be accurately diagnosed, he states, by skin testing. The hair is shaved in an area, marked with a checkerboard stamp and then individual squares of the checkerboard injected with known allergenic substances. Hives will appear almost immediately in reaction to those specific substances which confirms them as the offending allergens. The test is expensive but gives an accurate inventory of substances to remove from the dog's environment, if possible.

Food allergy is more difficult to detect those individual foods being allergenic but he details the lengthy procedures. Skin symptoms of food allergy mimic those of AID but, additionally, food allergy can be manifested in the gastrointestinal, neurological and respiratory systems (symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, anal itch, passing of gas, sneezing, asthma-like symptoms, behavior changes and seizures).

Dr. Ackerman details various treatments of both types of allergy and cautions against the longterm (*and indiscriminate*) use of steroids such as prednisone.

(I have had success with antihistamines such as Chlor-Trimeton® or Benadryl® available now without a prescription, which I give the minute I notice my Dals starting to scratch or bite frequently and certainly more than is usual and normal. If they do not significantly stop scratching or biting within 48 to 72 hours of receiving the antihistamine, I assume it is not AID and stop the medication. If they visibly do stop significantly, I continue the pills for 10 days to 2 weeks, stop them and watch if the itching and biting recur. If they do, I then see my vet before continuing the medication indiscriminately. But this technique has definitely aborted the "chain" reaction by stopping the scratching and biting before the skin is broken and infection sets in. On the other hand, this must not be considered a guaranteed panacea nor a simple "quick-'n-dirty" solution to all itching and biting. When in doubt, check with your vet !)

Incidentally, Dr. Ackerman notes that antihistamines are successful only in about one-third of dogs with AID.

Reviewed by:

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