

# INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO PET ALLERGIES

Allergies are a common concern in both humans and animals and understanding them is vital to keep your cat or dog comfortable and healthy. An allergy is essentially an overreaction of the immune system to substances that are typically harmless like food, pollen, dust, or even materials that come into contact with the skin.

## What is an Allergy?

An allergy occurs when the immune system mistakenly identifies a safe substance as a threat. The body then mounts a defensive response, releases histamines, which cause symptoms like itching, redness, swelling, or digestive upset. In pets, these symptoms can manifest as excessive scratching, ear infections, sneezing, or gastrointestinal issues.



## Why Pets Develop Allergies?

Just like people, pets can develop allergies at any age. Genetics, environment, and exposure play roles. Some breeds are more predisposed to allergies, while others may develop them after repeated exposure to specific allergens.

## Allergies vs. Sensitivities

It's important to distinguish between allergies and sensitivities. Allergies involve the immune system and often trigger more dramatic symptoms. Sensitivities, on the other hand, do not activate the immune system but can cause mild issues like digestive discomfort. For example, your pet may be sensitive to lactose but not allergic to dairy.

## Types of Allergies

- Environmental allergies are triggered by substances like pollen, mold, or dust mites, leading to skin irritation or respiratory problems.
- Food allergies occur when the immune system reacts to specific proteins or other components in the diet, resulting in itching, ear problems, or digestive symptoms.
- Contact allergies develop when a pet's skin reacts to materials like shampoos, carpets, or certain plants, often causing localized redness or irritation.

## The Importance of Veterinary Diagnosis

Because allergy symptoms can overlap with other conditions, a veterinary diagnosis is essential. A veterinarian can help determine the cause through physical exams, history, or allergy testing, and guide treatment to improve your pet's quality of life.

Understanding the basics of allergies allows pet owners to spot signs early and seek appropriate care, ensuring pets live happier, healthier lives.