

Individualized Approach Needed to Manage Canine Atopy



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Q What do we know about canine atopic dermatitis (cAD) that we didn't know 5-10 years ago?

A While there is still research to be done, recent studies have helped us to better understand and manage cAD. The importance of the cytokine IL-31 has been and continues to be pivotal, and has led to new treatment options. Meanwhile, understanding the epidermal barrier defect, which allows allergens to cause the immune response that triggers cAD, has helped us target therapies that aid in repairing the skin barrier. Finally, we have therapeutic diets for patients with cAD that have truly improved their quality of life.

Q Atopic dermatitis can be a complicated condition to manage. What should practitioners consider when formulating their treatment approach?

A Taking a multimodal approach to cAD is important, because no single therapy by itself will work for every dog. Atopic dermatitis creates a vicious cycle of itching, inflammation and, in many cases, infection. In a number of patients, a combination of products is needed; these include but aren't limited to:

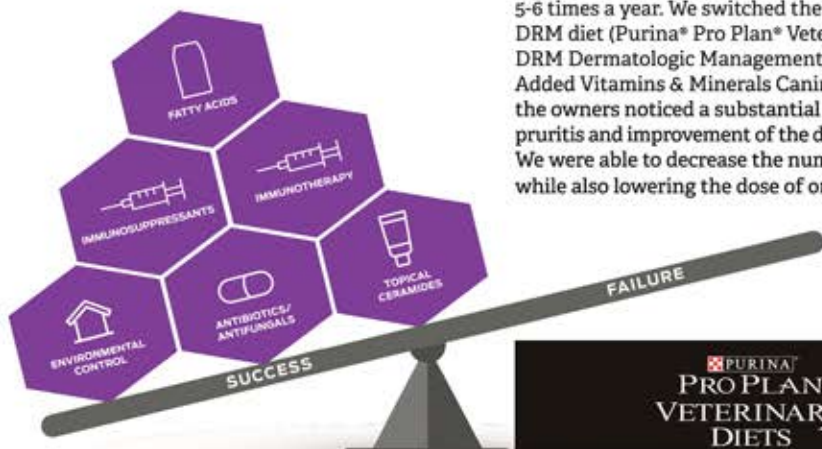
- Topical products, such as shampoos, spot-ons and sprays with antibacterial properties, antifungal properties, ceramides or free fatty acid precursors, which can help prevent infections and address skin barrier defects.
- Allergy-specific immunotherapy (ASIT) can be very beneficial and help some dogs either stop medications entirely or reduce the amount of medication needed to keep their atopy under control.

- Oral or injectable medications such as immunosuppressants and monoclonal antibodies can provide symptom relief and increase quality of life.
- Antibiotics and antifungal medications may be needed in cases of secondary infection. If a medication seems less effective or stops working, it's important to make sure an infection hasn't been missed.
- Stress reduction and preemptive treatment modifications can help prevent flare-ups triggered by stressful situations such as household changes, the owner traveling or a new baby.
- Nutrition is a very important component, and I have seen dogs show significant improvement on diets designed to nutritionally manage dogs with cAD.

Q Is the role of a cAD diet more, less or equally important in a dog with mild vs. severe atopy?

A While it sounds like there should be a simple answer to this question, there isn't—it depends on both the patient and the owners. If I have a dog with mild atopy, I may be more likely to recommend weekly bathing, antihistamines and an anti-inflammatory diet first. If I have a severely atopic patient, I might try to get the condition under control with ASIT—with or without oral or injectable medications—then introduce a therapeutic diet to see if it enables us to lower the dose of any of these medications.

It also depends upon the client. If an owner is willing to try a new diet in combination with everything else right away, I would definitely consider this approach. I recently treated a Pug whose cAD was not fully controlled on ASIT and oral medications after two years; it was flaring up 5-6 times a year. We switched the dog to Purina DRM diet (Purina® Pro Plan® Veterinary Diets DRM Dermatologic Management Naturals™ With Added Vitamins & Minerals Canine Formula) and the owners noticed a substantial reduction in pruritis and improvement of the dog's skin and coat. We were able to decrease the number of flare-ups while also lowering the dose of oral medications.



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