



DERMATOLOGY FOR ANIMALS  
**Intradermal Allergy Testing**

**Allergy Testing and Desensitization:** Allergy testing is performed in atopic pets NOT to make a diagnosis of allergies, but to indicate which allergens are to be included in a hyposensitization vaccine. (Remember, the diagnosis of atopy is made by symptoms, response to medications and eliminating the possibility of other itchy skin diseases such as food allergy or skin



parasites/infections). Allergy testing and hyposensitization injections (immunotherapy) are appropriate in animals with allergic symptoms that last longer than 2-3 months per year, and in pets in which the symptomatic therapy for allergies is not helpful, or which need steroids longer than 2-3 months out of a year. Allergy testing can be done with a blood test (which is more convenient and can be performed by most primary care veterinarians, but may be less accurate than skin testing), or by intradermal/skin testing (as seen on the right, usually performed by veterinary dermatologists, it requires a light sedative and shaving, and is considered the “gold standard” of allergy testing). Allergy hyposensitization injections are

given every 1-4 weeks (the dose and frequency of the vaccine are different for every pet), and are helpful in 70-75% of allergic pets to reduce symptoms and needs for medications. Allergy immunotherapy is usually a lifelong treatment and the degree of response to therapy varies with each individual animal; some pets only need the hyposensitization vaccine, some still need some symptomatic medications such as antihistamines, and some still need steroids, but at lower doses, less often or only during certain seasons. Allergy hyposensitization injections address the cause of a pet's itchy skin by changing/calming down the hyperactive immune response to the environmental allergens, but require time (2-12 months) for effect, so symptomatic medications are continued while immunotherapy has time for effect.

**Summary:** Although allergies in pets are not “curable”, they are very treatable and controllable in most pets. Every animal is an individual and often different medications need to be tried or combinations of medications may need to be used for maximal comfort. When the motivated pet owner, family veterinarian, and, in difficult cases, a veterinary dermatologist work together, our allergic pets can live long, comfortable lives.