

IMMUNOTHERAPY

ALLERGY SHOTS OR DROPS

What is immunotherapy?

Atopic Dermatitis (AD) is a very itchy skin condition where part of the problem is that the immune system is “overreacting” to common substances in the environment, like dust or pollens. Immunotherapy (commonly called “allergy shots” or “allergy drops”) is a way of changing the immune system so that it stops this over-reaction. It is a way of correcting part of the underlying problem of AD. The shots or drops are ‘drug-free’ – they contain extracts of all the things your pet is specifically allergic to. You give these to your pet starting with tiny doses and slowly increasing, so the immune system learns not to over-react to them.

What are the advantages and disadvantages?

Allergy shots or drops are generally very safe and without side effects. They offer the best chance of actually correcting the underlying cause, without a lifetime of drug treatment. However, they take several months to work, and sometimes they don’t help at all. It is possible, but very rare, for a pet to have a reaction to allergy shots. The reactions are generally not serious. For pets at higher risk for allergy shot reactions, allergy drops may be safer.



How well does it work?

Allergy shots or drops help about two out of three dogs. The response rate is less known in cats, but is probably about the same. Sometimes, pets will have dramatic positive benefits. Other times, the benefits are noticeable, but not as dramatic. Allergy shots or drops are often a *part* of a total management plan that may also include medicated shampoos, periodic medications, and other measures.

What is different between shots and drops?

Allergy shots are given with small syringes and tiny, nearly painless needles. They are very easy for most owners to give. They have to be given every two days for the first month, then every 7-21 days depending on the pet’s response. Allergy drop immunotherapy, also called SLIT, is given by squirting a few drops of solution into the mouth twice daily, rather than by injections.

Should I choose allergy shots or drops?

We consider both shots and drops to be “tried and true” methods, even though the drop formulation is newer. The treatments seem to have about the same effectiveness, and their cost is about the same. Your decision should be based mainly on which treatment you will find easiest to give your pet.

- » If you use allergy shots, you will have to give an injection to your pet periodically, for a long time. Some owners find them difficult because of fear of needles, or other factors.
- » If you use allergy drops, you will have to give the drops twice per day, every day, for a long time. The drops are easy to give, but if they are to work, you must be very committed to giving them regularly. If you miss treatment days, they may not work as well.
- » It is important to understand that both shots and drops are a long-term (perhaps lifetime treatment!)

What are the costs involved?

The cost of allergy shots or drops depend on which particular things your pet is allergic to, and on how often you have to give the shots. On average, a “kit” of the shots or drops costs between \$250 and \$350, and this will last about five months.

Will I have to come back for checkups?

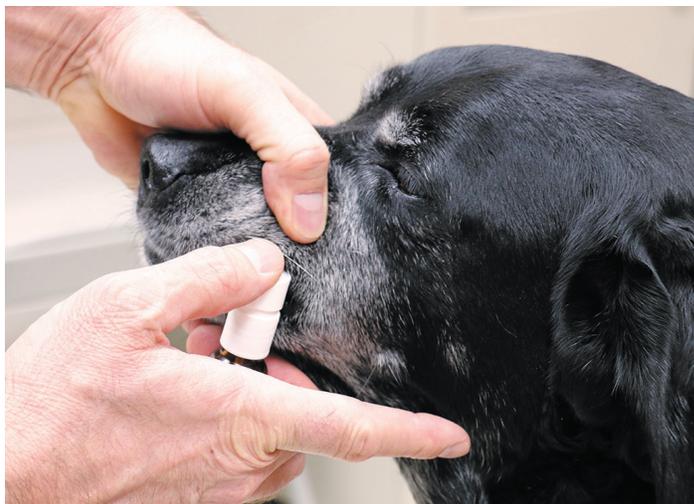
With either shots or drops, it is very important that you return for re-evaluation at intervals. We ask that you return for a checkup about three months after you start either treatment, and again at six months, and again at one year. These checkups are brief, and not expensive, but are very important to check your pet’s progress, adjust the treatment schedule, and check for any complications. These checkup appointments are required in order for us to be able to continue to provide the allergy medications for your pet.

How long will they take to work?

Shots or drops usually show some benefit within the first six months of treatment – sometimes, a substantial benefit, and sometimes much earlier than six months. At your six month appointment, your veterinarian will discuss the best course of action with you and whether to continue the current treatment or switch to an alternative.

How long do I give allergy shots or drops?

If the shots or drops are working, you will have to keep giving them for at least a year, and probably for two to three years. Some pets require lifetime treatment. It is important to remember to order a refill of your shots or drops when you are close to running out, as refills require 1-2 weeks to prepare.



Could drops work if the shots failed?

Yes, possibly. In our experience, about 50% of pets that have failed to improve with allergy shots will improve with allergy drops. We definitely feel it is worth a try.

Are there any bad side effects?

With shots, there could be a temporary itching at the site of the injection. It is rare, though possible, for a pet to have a more generalized allergic reaction to the shot, but rarely is this serious. With drops, there might be temporary facial itching or an upset stomach that usually disappears within a week. Generalized allergic reactions to drops are almost impossible, even if your pet had a reaction to shots in the past. With either type of treatment, sometimes the itching will worsen temporarily when you first start treatment or when you change to the next bottle. If any of these situations occur, notify your dermatologist, as the dose may need to be adjusted.

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