



Allergy testing may be recommended to identify the environmental triggers of dogs that have been diagnosed with atopic dermatitis. The purpose of testing is to guide the formulation of an allergenic extract that may be administered to desensitize a pet to the allergens upon future natural exposure. If an environmental trigger can be avoided, that is desirable, but it is often not feasible. The customized extract is administered either as an injection or as an oral spray. An alternative to customized immunotherapy is regionally-specific immunotherapy (RESPIT), which does not require allergy testing.

Allergy test and immunotherapy methods

Intradermal test (IDT). To perform an IDT, pets are sedated, an area on the chest is clipped of hair, and about 50 allergens are injected into the skin. A red swelling is interpreted as meaning that the pet is possibly allergic to that allergen. It is best if pets have not eaten the morning of their test. Certain medications (prednisone, antihistamines and topical cortisone) have the potential to influence the test, but usually do not. We will assess these with you as we plan for the IDT. Dr. DeManuelle prefers the IDT technique.

Percutaneous prick test (PPT). Dr. Carnett developed a testing technique for pets that is preferred in human allergy testing – the percutaneous prick test. Instead of injecting allergens into the deeper layer of skin, the dermis, pinpoint pricks are made with a device that also delivers a drop of allergenic extract on to the skin surface. Similar to IDT, the reactions are graded subjectively based on size and inflammation, in comparison to positive and negative controls. The PPT causes very little discomfort and we are usually able to perform the test on awake dogs laying on their sides, aided by lots of petting to keep them calm. The disadvantage is that it is a new technique in dogs and cats, with much less experience to draw upon.

We recommend that prior to a PPT, patients should be off of oral cortisone, topical cortisone, and antihistamines for 4 weeks, 2 weeks, and 1 week, respectively.

RESPIT. A third alternative for choosing the allergens to include in allergy immunotherapy mixtures is regionally-specific immunotherapy (RESPIT®), a product developed by Dr. Plant to make allergy relief available without allergy testing. RESPIT includes 20-22 allergens selected to be representative of the major botanical allergen groups that cause allergies in a geographic region. In a recent study, RESPIT was found to be approximately as effective as is reported for allergen immunotherapy based on test results. The disadvantage is that you will not have specific information about what allergens your pet is allergic to.

Blood, saliva, hair tests. Blood (serum) tests performed by different companies on the same samples have been shown to have poor agreement with one another. In independent studies, blood, saliva, and hair allergy tests have reported positive reactions to tap water, cow serum, and fake fur from a stuffed animal. For this reason and others, we do not routinely recommend them.