



Antihistamines for Dogs

Antihistamines are one more tool in our arsenal against pet allergies. Allergies can be a very frustrating problem for owners, and veterinarians, because no one treatment works for everyone. Just like each pet's allergies are a little bit different, individual pets also respond differently to each type of antihistamine. Unfortunately, this makes for some trial-&-error in determining what is going to work best for your furry friend to help keep the itches in check. The good news is that antihistamines are relatively inexpensive and most are readily available over the counter at human pharmacies.

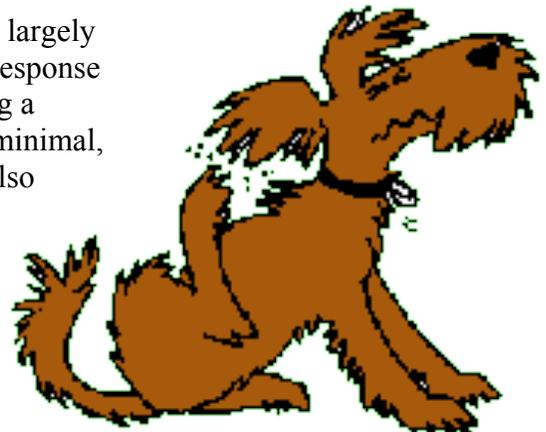
As with any medication, talk with your veterinarian before giving your pet antihistamines, especially if s/he is on any other supplements or medications. Antihistamines should be used with caution in pets that are pregnant, have seizures, or certain other health conditions. When conducting an antihistamine trial, be sure to give the antihistamine as prescribed for a solid week before deciding whether or not it works. Generic versions are fine, but be *very* sure that the medication you are using does not contain any other ingredients – some common “allergy medications” contain potentially harmful ingredients, like pseudoephedrine. Hiding the tablets in a treat, like Pill Pockets[®], or bit of canned food helps improve acceptance, but pets can also be pillled directly.

Benedryl[®] (generic = diphenhydramine)

For many years, Benedryl was the antihistamine of choice for pets because it was inexpensive and readily available over the counter. Side effects tended to be minimal except many pets become sleepy. For this reason, it has also been used to reduce anxiety in pets that don't travel well or are nervous during storms, etc. With the advent of some of the newer antihistamines (like Zyrtec), Benedryl has fallen out of favor somewhat because it often doesn't work as well. The other down-side to using Benedryl is that it should be dosed 2-3 times/day, at approximately 1mg per pound body weight. So a 75 lb dog would be getting 3 capsules (25mg each) three times daily – that's 9 capsules a day! Fortunately, this becomes much more reasonable for smaller dogs.

Zyrtec[®] (generic = ceterizine)

Zyrtec has become the new first-line drug for dog allergy, largely because of its convenient dosing schedule. Although individual response to antihistamines does vary greatly, this year our clients are seeing a higher response rate than with Benedryl. Side effects tend to be minimal, although some pets do become drowsy. The dosing schedule is also much more convenient, with dogs weighing over 10 lbs getting a single 10mg tablet once daily. Dogs weighing less than 10 lbs can have half of a 10mg tablet once daily.



Chlortrimeton® (generic = chlorpheniramine)

Chlortrimeton is another excellent antihistamine for dogs, and is the drug of choice for kitty allergies as well. It is approximately half the cost of Zyrtec per pill, but requires dosing twice daily instead of once. The average dog would get 1/4mg per pound; for example, a 16lb dog would get a single 4 mg tablet twice daily.

Atarax® (generic = hydroxyzine)

This is one of the few prescription-only antihistamines used in veterinary medicine. Dosing is very similar to Benedryl at 1mg per pound body weight 2-3 times daily. Less commonly used because a prescription is needed, it is one of the most effective antihistamines available to us.

EPA (Omega-3 Fatty Acids)

Although certainly not necessary, we have found that giving Omega-3 fatty acids (specifically eicosapentaenoic acid or EPA) to be very beneficial in treating allergies. Omega-3's are mildly anti-inflammatory and may work synergistically with the antihistamine to reduce the symptoms of allergy, while Omega-6 fatty acids tend to be more pro-inflammatory. If you have questions about giving your pet Omega-3 fatty acids, please ask us!

