

**Dear Dr. Wise:** My dog has been diagnosed with allergies. Are there allergy shots for dogs?

Yes, there are allergy shots for dogs. Also called “hyposensitization”, allergy shots consist of injections of a small volume of allergen (such as pollen) given to your dog at regular intervals for a long period of time. Allergies are caused by an over-reactive immune system, resulting in the release of chemicals in the dog’s skin that cause itching and irritation. The goal of hyposensitization is to acclimate your pet’s immune system to an allergen so that when an environmental exposure occurs, the immune response is less severe and your pet is more comfortable.

While they sound like a great idea, allergy shots are not ideal for every pet. Hyposensitization is only recommended for dogs suffering from canine atopic dermatitis (also called “atopy”). These dogs are predisposed to develop skin reactions like itching to common environmental substances like pollen or dust mites. Consult your family’s veterinarian to determine if your dog has been diagnosed with atopy and is a candidate for allergy shots. Other types of allergies are not responsive to hyposensitization.

If your dog is a candidate for allergy shots, it is also important to consider the prolonged effort required to give allergy shots. The shots are given by the dog’s owner almost every day for several weeks, after which the pet may need to receive the shots for the rest of its life. It may take several months to see any improvement in your pet’s skin. Not all dogs will improve with the shots. It is important to consult your family veterinarian to determine if allergy shots are a good choice for you and your dog.