

# *Understanding Intradermal Allergy Testing*

## **What is Intradermal Allergy Testing?**

Intradermal allergy testing is commonly called the “scratch test” and is very similar to the allergy test used to diagnose people. It is the most accurate test for identifying what allergens a pet is allergic to. There is no accurate test for food allergens, other than a strict diet trial, so this test doesn't include food allergies. We test all patients for reactions to the entire battery of common environmental allergens (55 different things that pets commonly react to). These allergens include pollens, mold spores and house hold allergens (like house dust mites). Dr. Strauss will discuss the suitability of this test, as well as other treatment and diagnostic options after examining your pet.

## **How we perform this test:**

For humane reasons, most patients will be sedated for this test. Sedation is different from anesthesia in that the patients are able to breathe without assistance, and are still a little bit awake (they will still respond to stimuli). We use a short acting sedating agent that can be reversed after the test is finished. Both the sedative and reversal agents are administered by injection, usually into a leg vein. Next, a post card sized area (about 4 inches by 8 inches) of skin will be shaved to perform the test. The test is usually performed on the dog's side, behind the armpit, on the chest. This location has been shown to give the most consistent reactions and is convenient for administering the test. Next we mark the skin with a felt tipped marker (non-toxic, washable ink) that helps us to keep track of which test spot corresponds to which allergen. A small amount (0.1ml) of dilute allergen is then injected above and below each mark. In addition to the allergy panel, each patient receives a positive control (histamine) and a negative control (saline) injection to be sure the test is working correctly and to help in interpreting the test results. Most patients react almost immediately to the injections. Performing and reading the test usually takes only about 30 minutes. Each injection site's reaction is graded (from 0 to 4) based on swelling and redness (wheal and flare). Positive reactions are noted on a result form, which you will get a carbonless copy of. Finally we administer some soothing cream to the test site, and often place a T-shirt so the pet doesn't scratch at the area.

## **What to expect for results:**

More than ninety percent of patients have positive reactions when tested. Patients typically react to 10-15 different allergens. We will explain each positive reaction (where it comes from, what season it is most commonly found during, etc.) While avoidance of identified allergens is desirable, in most cases we will recommend allergy injections to desensitize a patient.

**Benefits and risks of Intradermal Allergy Testing:**

Intradermal allergy testing is a very safe test. Common side effects from the testing include itching at the test site and tiredness for up to 24 hours after the test. Very rare, but serious side effects have been reported from both the sedation and the intradermal allergy test itself. While these risks are real, it should be noted that they are extremely rare.

The benefit of the test is that we almost always learn what patients are allergic to and can then offer tailored therapy to help with the allergic skin disease. Patients with serious allergies can benefit greatly from intradermal allergy testing.