

USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT THE IMMUNOTHERAPY IN ALLERGIC DISEASES

As you know, between 15-20% of dogs and cats in Spain suffer allergic diseases, which means that a lot of your patients can suffer this allergic diseases along their life.

The most common allergic diseases in pets are the allergy to flea bite (), food allergy (FA) atopic allergy or atopy, an important increase of these pathologies in the last years has been observed.

The allergic patients suffers a alteration in its immune system genetically programmed through which it reacts in a high way to the contact with some substances called allergens.

The veterinary allergy has crossed a long way in the last 25 years. During the 70's appears in the market the first "cutaneous test kits" for the diagnostic of the atopy in dogs, and they offered a limited selection of mixed allergens: some pollens, moulds, flea extract and dust.

The modern techniques of production have permitted to the production companies to improve in a high way the quality of the extracts and the antibodies used in the diagnostic test.

IMMUNOTHERAPY

❖ Degree of effectiveness that can be expected

Nowadays the degree of effectiveness that we can expect is about 85% of the cases with a good improvement of the symptoms or a total recovery.

As well, there is a group of animals in which, although the improvement is not so high, the immunotherapy permits in a high way to decrease the corticosteroids doses the patient needs to get a good life quality.

Before considering that an hiposensibility treatment does not work, we should wait at least one year. In these cases we must re-evaluate the patient and take a new decision.

❖ Treatment composition

The treatment composition will be based on the clinical history of the patient and in the test results ("in vivo" or "in vitro").

It is important to make a correct selection of the allergens that will be included in the immunotherapy treatment, giving that a high number of allergens, or the inclusion of allergens that is not so important in the

environment of the patient can decrease the effectiveness of the treatment.

So the keys for success will be:

- Choose the allergens with more reactivity.
- Choose the allergens with more presence in the environment of the patient.
- Choose a limited number of allergens (never over 8)

❖ In which animals it is usually more effective

There is no rules that will let us predict the effectiveness of the immunotherapy.

To priori we would be able to say, although in a very adventurous way, that a limited positive number of allergens and belonging to a same group (grasses, mites, etc) would be able to assume a greater effectiveness.

❖ Duration of the treatment

The treatment is composed by an initial phase, through injections first weekly and then each fifteen days increasing doses of allergens are injected. This phase takes about five months and a half.

The second phase is the maintenance phase, in which are injected monthly the doses without any secondary effect problems, the most efficient one. This dose is called maintenance dose.

The treatment must be maintained at least one year before making an evaluation of its effectiveness, therefore if we maintain it or not. If the treatment presents an effectiveness in the control of the diseases, we must go on with the treatment for at least 3 or 5 years; although some authors recommends to be used all along their life.

When can we suspect of a therapeutic failure and how to act

If after a year of treatment the patient does not present any type of improvement, we can conclude that in this case the elaborated immunotherapy is not effective. In this case we must repeat the test diagnostic to check if there are new positivities, and if not we must plan a symptomatic treatment in a long time.

❖ Possible secondary effects

The adverse reactions in the hiposensibilisation treatments are very rare, they are normally an increase of pruritus in the moment of the injection or small local reactions.

These reactions usually happen when there is a change of vial or in some more sensitive animals when they are exposed to the allergens, and these reactions are easily controlled by coming back to the previous dose or giving the animal low doses of corticosteroids.

More over, the immunotherapy does not have any secondary effect as others symptomatic treatments as corticosteroids and cyclosporine.

❖ Treatments that can be associated to the immunotherapy

Being the mechanism of action of the immunotherapy the creation of blocking antibodies of the IgE specific, the administration of other medicines is not contraindicated unless these possess for their mechanism of action or by high dose immunosuppressant effects.

So the combination of immunotherapy with corticosteroids or cyclosporine is very useful. In fact it would be recommended in the first phases of the hiposensibilisation treatment to give anti-inflammatory doses of corticosteroids or cyclosporine that control the symptoms of the patient while it takes effect (4-6 months).