



FORGET THE STEROIDS

Does your dog have skin allergies? Before resorting to medications for the itching and irritation, give Chinese herbs a try.

BY JEAN SCHERWENKA

Stanley, an eight-year-old golden retriever, owes his life to Chinese herbs. "I got him when he was a year old, just a baby," says Nancy Schaff. "The first year he was fine, the second year he was itchy, the third summer he was miserable, and by the fourth summer he looked like raw hamburger meat. I almost had to euthanize him."

Stanley's allergy tests identified an long list of food, insect and inhalant allergens, including chicken, carrots, rice,

grains, fleas and flea saliva, cats and cat dander, mold, grasses and trees. Nancy eliminated what culprits she could and used topical medications and prednisone to treat Stanley's remaining symptoms. The topicals did not work, and the prednisone gave him polyuria/polydipsia (PU/PD), a condition causing excessive thirst and large volumes of urine. So in addition to his itchy raw spots, weepy lesions and a stinky, gooey coat, poor Stanley was now having frequent and unavoidable accidents.

According to Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine, liver Qi stagnation is the root cause of allergies.

When a friend suggested Chinese herbs, Nancy consulted holistic veterinarian Dr. Christine Bessent, who recommended a specific Chinese herbal formula (herbsmithinc.com). It worked, and without causing any negative side effects gave Stanley his life back.

WHAT REALLY CAUSES ALLERGIES?

Animals can develop allergies to a variety of food, inhalant and insect allergens, and can suffer a variety of symptoms, including itching, swelling, weepy lesions, panting, irritable bowel and restlessness. Western medicine tends to see these symptoms as the whole picture and treat them with topical medicines and steroids. Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) sees the same symptoms but recognizes them as signs of an underlying, more serious problem in the animal's body. "To effectively treat an allergy, you must first address the underlying disharmony that has caused it," says Dr. Bessent.

According to TCVM, liver Qi stagnation is the root cause of allergies. As Dr. Bessent explains, the liver should work as a pump to provide a smooth flow of Qi (pronounced "chee") or life energy throughout the body. When a dog has a smooth and even flow of Qi, he enjoys good health. When his Qi becomes stagnant or blocked, it creates heat or inflammation. In some dogs, this heat or inflammation flares in the gut, and you'll see stomach problems. In other cases, it rises in the bladder and shows up as recurring bladder

infections. Stanley's heat moved to the skin and caused allergies.

THE WIND IN CHINESE MEDICINE

In nature, when a warm front meets a cold front, we experience a windy day. In Chinese Medicine, the same thing occurs in the body. Stanley's allergic reaction or heat met with his normal cool body temperature and created a "wind" that increased his surface sensitivity to the external environment. This "wind" in Stanley's body manifested as itchy skin.

Furthermore, according to TCVM, a healthy animal will have a perfect balance of two forces in his body – Yin (fluids) and Yang (heat). Liver Qi stagnation and allergic reactions turn up the Yang, which burns off the Yin, and this imbalance creates phlegm. The accumulation of phlegm in Stanley's body caused his foul odor and a greasy or goopy feel to his coat. "First you need to turn down that heat, then replenish the fluids," Dr. Bessent explains. A proper Chinese herbal formula will do both.

THE HUNT FOR FOOD ALLERGENS

Stanley's tests identified his food allergens, but in the absence of tests, you can identify the allergens at home through a simple process of food elimination. First, reduce your dog's diet to rice and boiled hamburger. Wait for all his symptoms to clear, then slowly re-introduce foods from his previous diet one at a time. Allergic reactions can take a

SO MANY SEASONAL ALLERGIES... SO FEW OPTIONS...

Seasonal canine allergies are among the most troublesome issues facing today's pet owner. There are so few options for someone who is looking to avoid harsh treatments while seeking a natural yet effective approach.

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few hours to several days to appear, so if after a week he shows no symptoms, introduce the next food.

If any of your dog's symptoms return during this process, permanently eliminate the last food added to his diet. Continue adding foods one at a time until you have identified enough problem-free choices to maintain a healthy diet for him.

From the Chinese medical perspective, food is medicine. Some are cooling, others are warming. To help bring down inflammation or heat in an allergic dog's body, cooling foods such as fish, duck or rabbit are called for. Warming foods like venison and lamb should be avoided.


WHAT ABOUT INHALED ALLERGENS?

While we can remove offending foods from a dog's diet, we cannot control pollen, dust mites, mold, grasses or trees. To help a dog live comfortably with these substances, Western medicine again focuses on symptoms – itching, hives, lesions – and typically treats them with antihistamines and corticosteroids. This initially brings improvement by suppressing symptoms, but your dog will likely develop more allergies, suffer worse symptoms

and need stronger doses of antihistamines and steroids. While you can see his allergies worsening over time, what you cannot see are the negative effects developing in his liver from the steroid treatment.

Chinese Medicine's broader perspective calls for herbal formulas specifically designed to resolve the underlying disharmonies causing a dog's allergies. For Stanley, the formula prescribed by Dr. Bessent offered a combination of Chinese herbs with cooling and Yin-tonifying properties that decreased his inflammation and restored a smooth, even flow of Qi.

In an allergy's early stages, a dog responds quickly to the herbs. If his liver shows damage from long term steroid treatment, however, it becomes more difficult to resolve his liver Qi stagnation, and the herbs will need more time.

Stanley's case was extreme. Nancy's patient search for solutions and her willingness to try the unfamiliar were a labor of love that paid off for her and her dog. Stanley's daily dose of Chinese herbs in applesauce has added years to their time together. 

CHINESE HERBS FOR ALLERGIES

Where Western herbs are usually used singly, Chinese herbs are used in combination to work in synergy with one another.

REQUIRED ACTION	HERBS
Dispel heat and eliminate dampness	Radix Scutellariae (huang qin), Semen Plantaginis (che qian zi), Rhizoma Alismatis Orientalis (ze xie), Radix Gentianae Longdancao (long dan cao), Fructus Gardeniae Jasminoidis (zhi zi)
Protect the Yin and nourish the blood	Radix Rehmanniae Glutinosae (sheng di huang), Radix Angelicae Sinensis (dang gui)
Disperse heat from blocked liver Qi	Radix Bupleuri (chai hu)
Harmonize and regulate the actions of the other herbs	Radix Glycyrrhizae (gan cao)
Calm spirit, nourish blood and strengthen heart and spleen	Arillus Euphoriae Longanae - long yan rou – Longan fruit
Nourish heart Yin and liver blood and quiet spirit	Semen Zizyphi Spinosae (suan zao ren)