Cyclosporine Approved for Treating Allergies

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In December, 2003, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved Atopica® (oral cyclosporine capsules developed by Novartis Animal Health) for the treatment of atopic dermatitis (an allergic skin condition) in dogs. When a dog is allergic to something, his body is reacting to certain molecules called 'allergens.' Atopy occurs when the dog is allergic to allergens that are inhaled. These allergens include:

- House dust and dust mites
- Molds
- Tree, grass, and weed pollens

A dog that is allergic to one of these allergens will show it through skin problems and itching, called atopic dermatitis.

Cyclosporine blocks the release of specific chemicals from white blood cells that cause inflammation in dogs that are atopic. The cyclosporine in Atopica is specially formulated to provide consistent absorption from the digestive tract.

Atopica is being marketed as being safer than the long-term use of corticosteroids, which may affect the kidneys, liver, and adrenal glands. The most common side effects seen with Atopica are occasional vomiting and diarrhea, which are normally mild and temporary and do not require the treatment with Atopica to be stopped.

Atopica will not provide immediate relief of signs (scratching, licking the feet, rubbing the face), but improvement of the signs of atopy can be expected within 4 weeks after beginning full-dosage treatment. Once good clinical improvement is seen, the dosage may be slowly decreased depending on how well the dog is responding.

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