**Scratch that itch**

Most pet owners are surprised the first time they have a pet diagnosed with allergies. They don't realise that allergies are just as common in pets as they are in humans, and can cause dogs quite a lot of discomfort.

This common problem, atopic dermatitis, is the development of itchy skin following exposure to substances that trigger an allergic response.

Atopic dermatitis is often caused by airborne allergens that are either absorbed through the skin or inhaled by the dog. As many of the allergens are unavoidable in the environment this problem is very difficult to manage.

The most common symptoms of canine atopic dermatitis include; redness in areas such as groin and armpits, itching, hair loss, greasy or flaky skin with an odour and excessive chewing on the paws.

Unfortunately, once dogs develop allergies they usually suffer more and more each year because their skin becomes more sensitive over time. What may start out as a problem only in the spring can become a year-round problem as your dog ages and their skin becomes increasingly sensitive.

Most dogs prone to atopic dermatitis have their worst episodes during the spring and summer months, so keep an eye out for itching in your pets over the next few months.

Steroids or anti-itch shampoos can help relieve the itching in the short-term, and omega 3 and 6 fatty acids will help with skin support.

In severe cases where the dog's skin has become infected, antibiotics may be required.

If your dog shows any of these signs he or she should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible.