

Happi's Story

(I Thought I Had a Chronic Over-groomer)

I did. However, it was for a reason that has been a long journey to discover why. I hope by sharing, it may help any breeder or Abyssinian pet owner to get an earlier diagnosis.



Happi's problems started in mid 2013 after the departure of her third litter. She started to lick predominately on her belly, gradually stripping her fur out. I assumed at the time that she was missing her kittens, as she had always been such an exceptional mum cat. Happi then started to develop blisters on her head, with the fur dropping out and leaving an open sore.

She started on a long-lasting Prednisolone injection and Covenia as initially my vet thought she had a mosquito allergy. Her time in the enclosure was restricted to only during the day, to avoid any contact with mosquitoes. However, we were somewhat puzzled as this was not a typical mosquito type reaction, which normally manifests itself on the nose leather & paw pads. Both injections provided some relief for around 4 months at this stage.

In 2014, Happi had her last litter, and there was some improvement in her whilst being totally confined to a bedroom. It was after the kittens' departure in late May that she went downhill quickly. Her over-grooming had become chronic. In hindsight, had I known where we would end up, I would have taken photographs of her belly. It was completely bald, as were the insides of her front and back legs. She also developed sores on her belly from her constant licking. She then started on the front of her legs.

Again, Happi was put on Prednisolone injections and she virtually lived on some sort of antibiotic to help keep the infections at bay. She then started on a long course of Vibravet since it does have anti-inflammatory properties. It worked for a short time to heal the sores and reduce her licking. At this stage, I was convinced it was all stress-related, as I had a lot of external stress going on in the home that she had never been exposed to before. Gradually, over a few months as things began to settle, Happi got no better. She was prescribed Clomicalm. It did stop her licking; however it stopped her doing anything. She became a lifeless creature who just sat and did nothing. This was not my Happi. I weaned her off the Clomicalm, and I was now at the vets every 6 weeks, for an injection for her.

I decided to remove all traces of wool from my home, as it is one of the known contact allergens, so there was not a piece of carpet, rug, scratching post or snooza left. I then took her off any dried food, neither of these made any difference over 3 months.

By mid-2015 the effects of the injections were starting to wear off faster; the last provided only 10 days' relief. At this point, my vet and I were now starting to become concerned about Happi's wellbeing. She was miserable, itchy, and scratching continuously. Her days were spent just licking and scratching, and her weight had started to fall. She went from 4.5kg down to 3.65 kg, so a referral to Murdoch University Dermatology was decided.

Before I could make the appointment, Happi had to go on a strict food trial to start the process of eliminating a food allergy as the problem. I had to pick one protein only, and not chicken or beef, as both are known food allergens. Therefore, she began her 6 weeks of frozen kangaroo, as it contained no preservatives.

In late September 2015, we went along to Murdoch University, and met the very dedicated and passionate Dr Mandy Burrows. Happi's weight was now down to 3.2kg. After reading her long history, it was decided there and then that Happi would be sedated and a large area shaved so they could conduct the skin prick test. This is done the same as it is in humans. A tiny amount of all 71 known allergens for felines is injected just under the skin, along with a dye so any reaction clearly shows as an illuminous dot. The higher the allergy, the larger/brighter the dot. Happi tested positive to 20 of the known 71 allergens.



One of her front legs August 2015

Included on the highly allergic list: Dandelion, Cyprus, Melaleuca, Australian Pine, Kentucky Blue, Yorkshire Fog (Velvet), Dust Mite, Flea, American Cockroach (*note Happi is so allergic to her favourite visitor in the enclosures that she only has to sniff the ground where it has walked, to trigger a reaction*), cheese mite, grain mite (*both found in any dried biscuit*)

Included on the milder allergic list: birch mix, wattle, canary grass, red top grass, perennial ryegrass, English couch, orchard grass, penicillum, mosquito, flour mite.

I sat in the waiting room, and an hour later when she came out and I heard the results I felt very overwhelmed with emotion. I finally had some answers for my Happi. She had been diagnosed with Feline Atopic Dermatitis, caused by an allergic reaction to environmental allergens, and possibly food proteins.

Happi was booked one week later to commence her Allergen Specific Immunotherapy – (ASIT) Rush programme. This is an attempt to stimulate the immune system to start to make antibodies to the known allergens. It works exactly the same way as the desensitisation programme that children and adults go through to help overcome environmental allergies.

It involved Happi spending a day at Murdoch University. She was given a series of injections of all her known allergens every 20 – 30 minutes over a 6-hour period, whilst being monitored, to ensure no anaphylactic response was triggered.

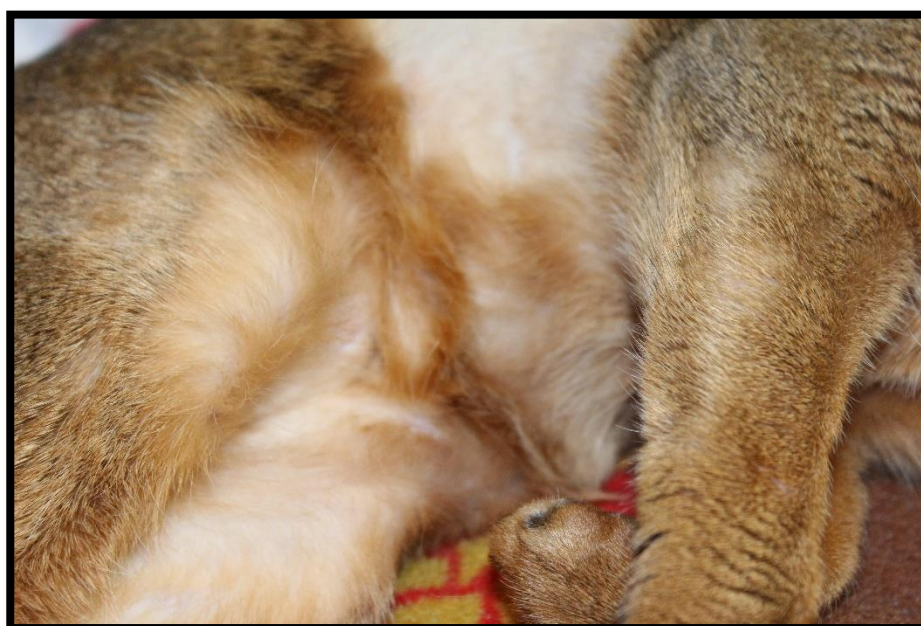
The RUSH programme enables patients to start on a maintenance dose straight away and is given less frequently, as opposed to the old conventional method where patients were given small doses weekly until they built up to the maintenance dose rate which may have taken up to 12 months.

The problems that arose from this were injections were more likely to be missed as owners became frustrated with the long process and animals may object to the injections when they are given so frequently. There are also owners who may be unable to give the injections, and are less likely to make the trip to the vets weekly; however, going every 3 weeks is more manageable.

Happi remains on a maintenance dose of .5ml liquid Prednisolone every day during her treatment. This may be reduced to 0.4 ml depending on her progress. The eventual aim is to have her off Prednisolone completely.

Happi is given a 1 ml injection containing her allergens sub-cutaneously every 3 weeks at home. This is her maintenance dose and it will continue for the next 3 years. The programme has a 70% success rate. I hope to see an improvement within 12 months. I have no huge expectations, only hope, that she falls into the 70% category and I am doing everything for her that I am told to do. She still licks occasionally (more so than normal grooming) but nothing like she did. I check the pollen count each day, and when the easterlies are blowing in strong, I keep her completely indoors. She has put some weight back on, and at our last check-up at Murdoch in December all her blood work came back completely normal, as did her urine analysis.

Happi has been introduced slowly to home cooked chicken, and home cooked fish, to which she has shown no adverse effects. However, fresh human grade diced beef triggered an increase in her licking and scratching within 24 hours, so for now she remains on a diet free of any beef, which includes any commercial cat food. I have just



Happi's belly fur gradually starting to grow back, and also notice the fur growth on her front leg, December 2015.

started to challenge her with Hills Science JD biscuits, which contain a high level of Omega 3, which is helpful for skin conditions and no beef derivative proteins. As advised by Dr Burrows. These are kept in the freezer, which kills any of the mites she is allergic to.

Combatting her relatively high allergy to the dust mite has been a bit of a challenge, and is continuing since my home is full of textiles, due to the love of mum's quilting. Happi has her own bedding upon beds, which I change & boil daily. I also now vacuum daily to try to keep the dust to a minimum. Happi is given a monthly flea treatment of Activyl (regardless of the fact that I have not seen a flea here in years) as contact with a flea could set her back and undo the past months of her treatment.

Does Happi rule my life? Of course! She is so very special to me and all I want is for her to be well.

Dr Mandy Burrows has promised an article for the Abyssinian Breeder Magazine on her success with treating Abyssinians against the dust mite using the RUSH treatment. I have seen photographs of the before and after, of one particular patient who now lives Prednisolone-free and the photographs are amazing. I will send this to the Editor as soon as she does this for me.

I also have a very interesting paper written by the Sydney University Dermatology, on Abyssinians and the current research they have done on Feline Atopic Dermatitis. Once I get permission as per Editor's advice, I will forward this to him.

I hope I can continue with Happi's story and let you all know of her progress. My article is rather compressed inasmuch as her symptoms go over the years, so anyone wanting more details please contact me and I am willing to share with you.

Helen Norwood 2016