

Diet Trials.

We advise an elimination diet trial if we suspect your pet has a food allergy or food intolerance. Signs of food allergy/intolerance vary between individuals and can mimic other diseases, so it can be difficult to diagnose a food allergy. Pets may also have other allergies or diseases alongside a food allergy. The picture can be even further complicated if yeast, bacterial or parasitic infections are also present on top of an underlying allergic disease.

What signs suggest my pet is sensitive to food?

The most common symptoms involve either the skin (typically itching) and/or gastrointestinal signs. These include:

-  Frequent scratching
-  Hair loss
-  Red and inflamed skin
-  Recurrent ear problems
-  Vomiting or diarrhoea
-  Flatulence

What causes Food Allergies/Intolerance?

The causes of food allergies and the intricate mechanisms behind their development are currently quite poorly understood. Food allergy and intolerance can develop at any age; it can take months to years for your pet to develop an allergic response to a certain food. Some breeds are more at risk of developing food allergies/intolerances West Highland White Terriers and Cocker Spaniels are particularly prone. Inflammation and infection can damage the digestive system and may lead to food allergies/intolerance. Beef and wheat allergies are particularly common, but your pet can be allergic to any component of its diet.

How is Food Allergy/Intolerance diagnosed?

The only reliable way to diagnose a food allergy/intolerance is to perform an elimination diet trial. This involves feeding your pet a food which is composed of proteins and carbohydrates that your pet has never eaten before.

Important points to follow:

The new diet must be fed for 8 weeks before we can be sure if it has had an effect.

-  Only offer water to drink.
-  DO NOT give ANY treats, chews, table scraps etc.
-  If you have more than one pet, make sure there is no chance your pet on the diet trial has access to your other pets' food.

Dogs - take extreme care on walks that your dog doesn't scavenge any extras whilst out.

Cats - must be kept indoors for the duration of the trial. It will be impossible to track their eating habits once they've left the house.

The comfort and wellbeing of your pet is paramount, so we may need to provide additional short-term medication in the early stages of the trial.

How do I pick a suitable diet?

We may advise a blood test first to try and identify to foods your pet is most likely to be allergic to. This acts as a guide as to the most appropriate diet to trial but is not a fool proof method for selecting a diet as how the gut reacts to certain foods isn't always reflected in the blood test.

There are a number of commercial diets available; we will discuss with you which diet we feel is most suitable for your pet. Knowing your pet's previous diet history is important to help us make the most appropriate choice.

There are also some specialised diets termed "hydrolyzed diets" which may be appropriate in some cases. These are processed in such a way that the molecules within the food are broken down to a size where they can no longer trigger an allergic response.

Tips for success

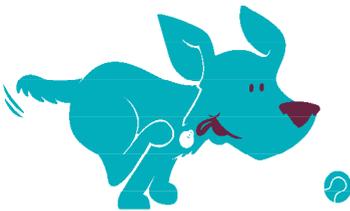
We understand getting your pet to accept a new diet can be easier said than done. Here are a few tips to try and maximise your success.

-  Transition the diet gradually. Start by adding a small amount of the new diet to their usual food and gradually increase the ratio of new food to old food over the course of a week.
-  Stick to a consistency of food your pet is used to. If they prefer dry kibble, then select a kibble diet. Likewise, if they are more used to canned diets then stick to these.
-  Keep feeding times consistent. Sticking to your pets usual feeding routine will maximise the chance of them accepting the new food.
-  Keep a journal of any food or treats your pet has accidentally eaten and the dates they had them. Mishaps can easily happen and it's better for us to know if there have been any slip ups so we don't misinterpret the results of the trial.

What happens next?

Once the allergies are controlled we can try and "re-challenge" your pet with food ingredients we have excluded from the diet. If, for example, chicken was reintroduced and within 2 weeks no signs recurred we could then add another food. But if symptoms return then we can assume chicken was one of the foods triggering the signs and avoid it in future.

Once we know which foods trigger your pet's problems, they should be avoided for the rest of their life. Bear in mind some pets will develop allergies to new foods over their life, so be vigilant for any signs returning.



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