



FOOD ALLERGIES in PETS

We likely know someone who has an allergy to some type of food, whether it's peanuts, shellfish, yeast (in bread), dairy products, etc. But you may be surprised to learn that food allergies account for approximately 10 to 15% of allergy cases that we see in dogs and cats. And the problem appears to be getting worse.

The majority of allergies we see in pets are related to pollens (from grass, trees and weeds), dusts and dust mites, molds and mildew, and fleas. Typically, these allergies are seasonal in nature, just like in people. Allergies from these sources usually cause hair loss, skin irritation, skin infections as well as frequent biting, scratching, chewing, licking and rubbing. Yet pets with food allergies will often exhibit the same symptoms and the same skin condition. To complicate matters, **at least 50% of pets with food allergies also have an allergy to either pollens, dust, molds, mildew or fleas.**

Food allergies are always suspected when we see a very itchy dog that's free of fleas and mange. The typical itchy areas include the **ears**, the **feet**, the **armpits**, the **face**, and the **groin** area. Many dogs also have gastro-intestinal problems such as occasional vomiting, diarrhea or an increase in the frequency of bowel movements. When pets have **year-round** skin and/or ear problems, we always have a stronger suspicion of a food allergy.

WHAT ARE PETS USUALLY ALLERGIC TO ?

DOGS: * **Beef** * **Wheat** * **Corn** * **Soy** * **Chicken (+ Duck and Turkey in some dogs)**

* **Eggs** * **Lamb** * **Dairy** (often in the form of **Whey Protein** or **Casein**)

* **These 8 food ingredients** account for **~95%** of food allergies in dogs

* **If you commit to a food allergy trial (details later), then you must avoid these ingredients !**

* Oatmeal, pasta, pork, fish, turkey, rabbit, rice flour, artificial food additives and food preservatives can also cause food allergies. Approximately 80% of dogs are allergic to only 1 or 2 food sources.

Dog Breeds often affected: Cocker Spaniels, Springer Spaniels, Labrador Retrievers, Collies, Poodles, Schnauzers, Shar-Peis, Westies, Boxers, Dachshunds, Lhasa Apsos, German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers and Dalmatians

CATS: * **Beef, dairy products, and fish** account for 90% of food allergies

* Pork, chicken, rabbit, lamb, eggs, clam juice and cod liver oil are other potential sources of food allergies

Cat breeds more likely to be affected: Siamese and mixed-Siamese

A VERY COMMON MISTAKE THAT MANY PET OWNERS MAKE By far the most common mistake pet owners make when they think their pet may have a food allergy is to simply purchase a new dog or cat food without considering what may actually be causing a food allergy ... or they assume that their pet must be allergic to some grain. So they go to their local pet store and switch to a grain-free diet (which might work !) or any diet that sounds like it's better than what they're currently feeding their pet. But all too often, pet owners are doing nothing more than simply switching "labels", but they may not be avoiding the ingredient that causes the food allergy. Now that you know what pets are most likely allergic to, you can understand why this often does not work. Avoid the trap of simply changing the diet just because you feel compelled to "do something".

DIAGNOSING FOOD ALLERGIES With allergies to pollens, fleas, house dust, etc, we can perform skin tests (like a "patch test" in a person) or blood tests to find out specifically what pets (or people) are allergic to. Unfortunately, there's **no reliable skin test or blood** test that can help us identify what **food** a pet may be allergic to.

So, when we suspect a food allergy, we want to place that pet on a "food allergy trial", which means that we need to feed a special diet in which we avoid any protein / food source that the pet has eaten before.

We now have a variety of commercial diets designed to "test" for a food allergy, but there is no single diet that works for all allergic pets. Even under the best of circumstances, **only 80-85% of pets will respond well to a food allergy trial.** Frustrating, isn't it ?

Commercial Diets for food allergies are divided into 3 categories:

1) **Grain-Free diets** - These diets have become very popular recently, and many pet owners notice improvement when they switch their pet to grain-free. But, DO NOT fall into the trap of thinking that all pets that are itchy have an allergy to grain ! Understand that we still see far more environmental allergies than food allergies.

2) **Novel ("new") protein diets** - The idea is to offer a food that the pet hasn't been exposed to before such as **Rabbit, Venison, or Kangaroo. Salmon and White Fish** can be good choices ... but ONLY if your pet has never eaten them before in any form (canned tuna, scraps off your dinner plate, etc.). Many veterinary dermatologists recommend the brand **Natural Balance** as an excellent commercial diet since it is very limited ingredient.

3) **Protein Hydrolysate diet** (such as Hill's Z/D) - These diets are made by chopping up the proteins in the food to tiny "peptides" which the body presumably cannot detect, and so the body should not have an allergic reaction to. However, some pets will still have a reaction to these foods, so we don't recommend using them during a food allergy trial. But they can be tried later on after if pet improves with a diet change.