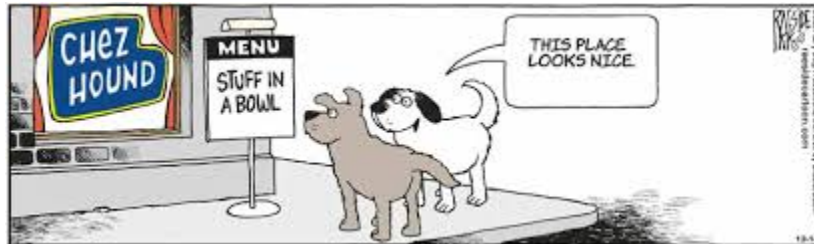


## Your guide to elimination diet trials



If your pet has a suspected food allergy, we are here to help!

Food allergies often present themselves as skin or ear problems. If your pet is displaying:

- Itchiness
- Changes to skin & coat (including hair loss)
- Diarrhea or soft stools
- Dry skin &/or dandruff
- Vomiting
- Red or inflamed skin
- Frequent or recurring ear infections
- Straining to pass stools
- Repeated skin infections

...they may have food allergies! Talk to your veterinarian about trying an elimination diet trial.

### KEEP IN MIND:

- There are no accurate skin or laboratory tests for food allergies in pets. The only way to diagnose a food allergy is using an elimination diet trial.
- Food allergies & environmental allergies may present similarly. In fact, your pet could have both.
- Keeping a calendar of your pet's symptoms, medications, and foods can help to figure out what is working and what is not.

\* Information from Canadian Academy of Veterinary Dermatology





# DIAGNOSING FOOD ALLERGIES IN PETS

## WHAT IS AN ELIMINATION DIET:

A diet which strictly excludes any food containing the ingredients that your pet may be allergic to. Elimination diets can be one of two categories: novel ingredient diets or hydrolyzed diets.

### *Novel Ingredient Diet:*

Made from food that your pet has never eaten. As such, they are new, or “novel” to your pet's immune system. Typically, the immune system tolerates these ingredients because they have not had time for an allergy to develop. Novel ingredients can be a kibble, wet food, or home-prepared food, based on your veterinarian's recommendation and your preference. These diets can be very effective, however, there can be drawbacks. For one, it can be hard to find ingredients that are truly novel – many foods have such a mixture of ingredients that your pet may have already been exposed to them at some point. Secondly, some pets have reactions to ingredients that cross-react with ingredients that they have never eaten. For instance, some pets that are allergic to beef may show symptoms when fed lamb, even if they have never eaten this protein before. Thirdly, most kibbles and wet foods are made in facilities that handle many different ingredients daily, so almost all have some cross contamination with ingredients that are not listed on the label, such as other protein or grain sources.

### *Hydrolyzed Diet:*

Made with ingredients that are broken down (hydrolyzed) in a way to make them very small. These tiny fragments are so different from the full-sized protein that they are less likely to trigger an allergy. For instance, even if your pet had an allergy to soy, they may be able to eat a food made from hydrolyzed soy. As such, hydrolyzed diets can be a good choice for pets that have eaten a wide variety of foods. Veterinary brand hydrolyzed diets are PCR tested to ensure NO cross contamination with other food allergens is possible.

Regardless of which elimination diet you try – it must be a food that they are able to eat happily and digest well for 8 weeks. Every pet is different, so it may take several different foods before we get it right. Of course, some pets will have opinions about their new diets. It is most important that they continue eating their food and do not stop. If your pet is on a special diet for allergies but will not eat enough of this diet, you must contact your veterinarian immediately for advice on how to proceed. It is possible that they will be switched back to their previous diet for a short period to get them eating well again. Sometimes more than one diet trial may be recommended by your veterinarian. If your pet improves

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# DIAGNOSING FOOD ALLERGIES IN PETS

somewhat but is still showing signs of a milder irritation (skin disease, etc.), then your vet may advise pursuing another trial with a different protein to see if there will be further improvement. YES, it can be a process!! The great benefit in the end, is that if your pet's allergy symptoms can be controlled by dietary changes alone, then your pet should not require chronic medications to control allergy signs. However, if diet trials do not resolve the allergy symptoms, then environmental allergies are likely a component of your pet's symptoms. In this case, medications may be necessary long term since controlling exposure to environmental allergens like dust mites and pollen is very difficult.

## WHAT IS AN ELIMINATION DIET TRIAL?

An 8-week test period when your pet can eat one thing only. Any other food, including treats, can affect the results of the trial. Your pet's best chance of responding to the diet is to be 100% strict with the trial for a full 8 weeks. In those 8 weeks, you will begin to see a 50-100% improvement in condition, depending on if food allergies are present. However, to confirm that this improvement was not due to other factors (medications, season changes, environmental changes, etc.), after 8 weeks, your veterinarian may have you return to your pet's regular food and treats to see if their symptoms return. This is called a "dietary challenge" and is only done after your veterinarian has reassessed your pet.

## WHY 8 WEEKS?

It takes time for the skin to normalize after a food allergen is removed. A diet trial of 8 weeks will diagnose about 95% of food allergies, whereas doing just 4 weeks would only diagnose about 50% of food allergies.

## FAQ:

*Q: I haven't changed my pet's food recently & they have no digestive issues; could they still have a food allergy?*

A: Yes, in fact, many allergies come from food they have eaten for 2+ years. Only a small percentage of pets will have gastrointestinal signs such as vomiting or diarrhea – it is much more likely their allergies will affect their skin and/or ears.

\* Information from Canadian Academy of Veterinary Dermatology



*Q: What treats can I give during a diet trial?*

None! Unless they are specifically made to accompany the recommended food. Even treats with a hypoallergenic label can be inappropriate for the specific trial that your pet is on. Keep in mind, even the tiniest amount of flavouring (flea treatments, etc) could set off an allergy.

*Q: Will I need to feed the recommended diet forever?*

Usually, no. Even if your pet has a food allergy, your veterinarian can often recommend other foods other than the diet trial that will work for longer-term feeding. Of course, if your pet does not improve in the 8 weeks, there is no reason to continue with that food.

## REASONS ELIMINATION DIETS FAIL:

- Chewable or flavoured medications
- Nutritional supplements
- Feeding treats
- Flavoured toothpaste
- Chewable or flavoured medications
- Gelatin capsules
- Unwashed dishes, bowls, & cutlery
- Fatty acids (fish oils, etc.)
- Food dropped on the floor
- Mixing & matching food
- Food used to hide pills
- Stealing from other pets' bowls
- Hunting (mice, etc.)



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# DIAGNOSING FOOD ALLERGIES IN PETS

## EXAMPLE TRANSITION SCHEDULE:

Day	Current Diet %	New diet %
1	90	10
2	90	10
3	75	25
4	75	25
5	60	40
6	60	40
7	50	50
8	50	50
9	40	60
10	40	60
11	25	75
12	25	75
13	10	90
14	10	90
15	0	100

## DON'T GIVE UP!

Your veterinarian will always recommend a food that they think is best for your pet, however, what your pet thinks is what matters the most! Call your vet if your pet is refusing food, has diarrhea, or any other problems. More serious issues can arise from lack of eating. Veterinary diets are guaranteed, so the food can be returned and replaced with another if your pet does not like it.

\* Information from Canadian Academy of Veterinary Dermatology

