

# Food Allergies

Animal Hospital, Inc.

Clermont



## General Information

Just as allergies plague many people, they also affect our pets. Some allergies like dust allergies, food allergies, and flea allergies are a problem throughout the year. Other allergies to things such as pollens and molds follow a seasonal pattern and are only present for only part of the year when certain plants are pollinating or for more extended times throughout the warm months. Food allergies may be difficult to distinguish from other types of allergies because they can cause many of the same signs such as itchy skin and recurrent ear infections. Below you will find information on food allergies in your pet, the signs that indicate an allergic reaction, and some practical ways for minimizing the severity of your pet's allergic condition. Information is also available on flea allergies, atopy (inhaled allergens) and contact allergies. If treating the food allergy helps some but not completely, request more information on these other topics. Many pets suffer from multiple types of allergies at the same time.

## Causes

Most food allergies in dogs and cats are caused by common components in pet foods. For some animals, the grain component causes the allergy (corn, wheat, etc.) while other animals are allergic to the protein source (beef, poultry, etc.). Most food allergies take time to develop. This means that they are rarely seen in young animals (less than six months old) and that a change in diet may take several months or more to cause signs of allergy unless there has been prior exposure to the ingredient that is causing the reaction.

## Signs

Dogs and cats suffering from food allergies can exhibit any combination of the following signs:

- Itchy Skin
- Hives
- Incessant Licking at Feet (Itchy Feet)
- Recurrent Ear Infections
- Periodic Vomiting, Especially Shortly After Eating (may be mild to severe)
- Chronic Diarrhea or Loose Stool
- Excessive Gas
- Poor Appetite
- Thin Body Condition/Inability to Gain Weight

## Diagnosis

Food allergies must be diagnosed by performing an 8-week diet trial. Prescription allergen-free diets are available at Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc. Animals on a diet trial must be fed **ONLY** that diet (no treats, table food, or food from other household pets) for a minimum of 8 weeks. If your pet's signs markedly improve during the trial, signs can be attributed to a food allergy.

Continue feeding only the prescription food until all signs abate or until no further improvement has been seen for at least two weeks.

At this point, you may opt to treat your pet's allergy by continuing to feed the prescription diet, or you may opt to determine exactly which components of commercial brand foods are causing the allergy by performing the following food-challenge trial:

### **Food-Challenge Trial to Identify the Food Allergy**

- Continue feeding the prescription diet throughout the food-challenge trial. Do not allow your dog to eat ANY other foods (no treats, table food, or food from other household pets) except the prescription food and the trial challenge item.
- Add cooked boneless, skinless chicken to your pet's diet for two weeks or until a reaction
  - Look for any of the signs your pet was experiencing before the original diet trial.
  - Look for any signs of upset stomach (vomiting, diarrhea, increased gas, decreased appetite) even if your pet did not experience these before.
  - If no signs are seen within two weeks, your pet is most likely not allergic to poultry. Proceed with the rest of the trial.
  - If signs occur, stop feeding the chicken and feed only the prescription diet until all signs are completely resolved. Only then can you proceed with the trial
- Add boiled ground beef to your pet's diet for two weeks or until a reaction is seen.
  - Look for any of the signs of reaction (as with the chicken trial).
  - If no signs are seen within two weeks, your pet is most likely not allergic to beef. Proceed with the rest of the trial.
  - If signs occur, stop feeding the beef and feed only the prescription diet until all signs are completely resolved. Only then can you proceed with the rest of the trial.
- Add whole wheat bread to your pet's diet for two weeks or until a reaction is seen.
  - Look for any of the signs of reaction (as with the chicken trial).
  - If no signs are seen within two weeks, your pet is most likely not allergic to wheat. Proceed with the rest of the trial.
  - If signs occur, stop feeding the bread and feed only the prescription diet until all signs are completely resolved. Only then can you proceed with the rest of the trial.
- Add canned or frozen corn to your pet's diet for two weeks or until a reaction is seen.
  - Look for any of the signs of reaction (as with the chicken trial).
  - If no signs are seen within two weeks, your pet is most likely not allergic to corn.
- Once all four of the major allergens have been tested, look for commercial foods that do not contain the ingredient(s) that caused an allergic response in your pet. If none of the above items generated a return of allergic signs, talk to our doctors about other ingredients that can cause allergic reactions.
- When starting a new commercial food, feed that food exclusively (no treats, table food, or food from other household pets) for at least two weeks to insure that your pet is not allergic to any component of that food.
- Remember that food companies may change the formula of the food without notifying the consumer. If your pet starts to show the signs of the allergy without a change in the type of food you are feeding, this may be the case.
- Also remember that different foods made by the same company will have different ingredients. Don't just choose the brand, choose a specific product of a specific brand.

### **Treatment**

Do not allow your pet to eat any food containing known allergens. If the food-challenge trial portion of the diet trial is not completed, feed your pet the prescription diet exclusively. Read all labels VERY carefully. Even a small amount of a food your pet is allergic to can cause a reaction that can last up to eight weeks. Once the diet trial is complete and your pet is doing well, introduce treats, table scraps, etc. very slowly (one item every two weeks) using foods that you know will not trigger your pets allergies. Prescription allergen-free treats are available through Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc. for this purpose. Most fresh or frozen vegetables other than corn (carrots, green beans, celery, tomatoes, etc.) are safe for animals with food allergies. By adding new foods and treats one at a time, you can make sure that your pet is not allergic to the newly introduced item.

#### **Clermont Animal Hospital Inc.**

1404 Old State Route 74 Batavia, Ohio 45103

**513-732-1730**

[www.ClermontAnimal.net](http://www.ClermontAnimal.net)

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