



Food Allergies

Food allergies can occur when your pet is allergic to one or more ingredients in his food. Allergies can develop at any time even if your pet has been eating the same food for years.

Signs of a Food Allergy

A food allergy can affect the stomach and intestines as well as the skin. If only the stomach and intestines are affected, your pet may vomit, have a decreased appetite, increased gas, or diarrhea.



Common skin issues that occur with food allergies include recurring ear infections, itchy skin, itchy paws, and recurring skin infections. Most environmental allergies only occur during part of the year while food allergies occur year round. However, indoor environmental allergies can also occur year round. If a food allergy is suspected, a food trial is the best way to diagnose it although blood tests may also help.

Testing

To do a food trial, you feed a hypoallergenic diet for 8-12 weeks until the allergy signs go away. Then, you challenge your pet by feeding the original food. When the allergy returns, you feed the hypoallergenic food again. If the signs go away again, it's official: your pet has a food allergy. If you

want to determine which ingredient is causing the allergy, you can challenge your pet with each individual ingredient.

A blood test is also available to identify food allergies but it is not as reliable as a food trial. Some people prefer to simply feed the hypoallergenic food rather than determine the exact allergy.

Points to Remember

It is important that your pet doesn't get any other treats or flavored medicine (such as Heartgard) during his food trial as this may interfere with the test.

Hypoallergenic food is NOT the same thing as over the counter foods that say they are for allergies or limited ingredient foods. Hypoallergenic food is specifically formulated to not cause an allergic reaction regardless of the ingredients. These are prescription foods.

Over the counter foods found at pet stores usually contain "limited ingredients" or "novel proteins". The idea with these foods is that you feed your pet a protein source, such as venison or duck, which your pet has never eaten before. The body doesn't recognize it and shouldn't react. The problem is that most over the counter foods are contaminated with other proteins that cause allergic reactions.

Make sure to clean your yard and cat litter boxes well if you have a dog that likes to eat feces.

It can take 8-12 weeks for the allergens (ingredients causing the allergy) to leave the body completely. If you reintroduce the original food before this time, the test may not work.





Everyone in the household, friends, and guests need to be in on the plan. Otherwise, they may sneak food to your pet without you knowing about it and ruin the test.

Summary

If your pet has food allergies, they will always have food allergies. The best treatment is to avoid the problem. Make sure to let everyone know that a food allergy is present (groomer, vet clinic, boarder, pet sitter).

Identifying the underlying cause of your pet's skin or stomach issues can help make your pet's life much better (and help your pocketbook!). Just get through the initial testing. Food allergies, once identified, are usually easy to manage. If food allergies are the only problem, the skin and stomach issues may completely resolve. If your pet has other problems such as environmental issues, by removing the food allergy, you can help decrease the frequency and severity of allergies.