



Food Allergies and Elimination Diets in Dogs

Allergic reactions are unpleasant for animals and exasperating for their owners. A dog suffering from a food reaction, for example, might scratch itself or chew its skin. If your dog has skin or ear problems, your veterinarian may want to test for a cutaneous adverse food reaction or, more simply, a “food allergy.”

There is no accurate skin or laboratory test for food allergies in pets. A dog with a food allergy looks just like one with environmental allergies and might, in fact, have both. Currently, the only way to diagnose a food allergy is using an elimination diet trial.

The elimination diet trial is an eight-week test period when your dog can only eat the food recommended by your veterinarian. Any other food, even a tiny treat, can affect the results of the trial.

Frequently Asked Questions

I haven't changed the food recently and my dog's stool is normal; could he still have a food allergy?

Yes. In fact, most dogs with food allergy have eaten their food two years or longer. And it's very common for the allergy to affect only the skin or ears.

What treats can I give during a diet trial?

None, unless they are specifically made to accompany the recommended food. Don't assume that treats with a hypoallergenic label will be suitable. Even the tiniest amount counts: the flavouring in a single monthly heartworm pill is enough to set off an allergy.

Can I feed fruit or vegetables?

Fruit and vegetables can sometimes cause allergic reactions too. Don't assume they will be okay.

Can I use a pet store food to diagnose a food allergy?

Studies show that many store-bought foods can contain small amounts of ingredients not listed on pet food labels, making them unsuitable for the eight-week elimination diet trial period.

How about a grain-free diet?

Grain-free diets are not effective for elimination diet trials unless your dog only has a known grain allergy. Since your veterinarian rarely knows what your dog is allergic to when starting the diet trial, many food allergies would be missed by simply switching to a grain-free diet.

What about a raw food diet?

Raw foods are not recommended for diet trials. They don't work any better than their cooked counterparts, and pose health risks to your dog and your family.

Will I need to feed the recommended diet forever?

In most cases, no. Even if your dog has a food allergy, your veterinarian can often recommend foods other than the trial diet that will work for long-term feeding. And of course, if your dog does not improve by eight weeks, there is no reason to continue the food.

Why is the diet trial so long?

It takes a long time for the skin to normalize after a food allergen is removed. A diet trial lasting eight weeks will diagnose about 95% of food allergic dogs. A trial lasting four weeks will diagnose only about 50%.

How can I find out exactly what my dog is allergic to?

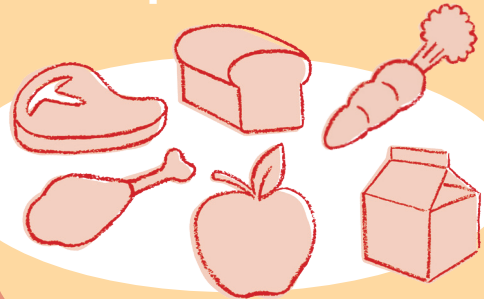
Your veterinarian can guide you through a sequential process (provocation) that involves adding individual suspected food allergens to the diet for up to two weeks at a time.

Which elimination diet: hydrolyzed protein or novel ingredient?

A hydrolyzed diet is made with proteins that have been broken down into smaller pieces. In the case of extensively hydrolyzed proteins, most of the protein is broken down to the level of single amino acids, which are the individual building blocks of proteins. These are less likely to trigger an allergic reaction. Hydrolyzed diets can be a good choice for dogs that have been exposed to a variety of foods and treats in their lifetime or when the diet history is not fully known. Novel ingredient diets contain only ingredients that the dog has never previously eaten (although this may be difficult to ensure) and may include kibble, wet food, or home-prepared food, based on your veterinarian's recommendation.

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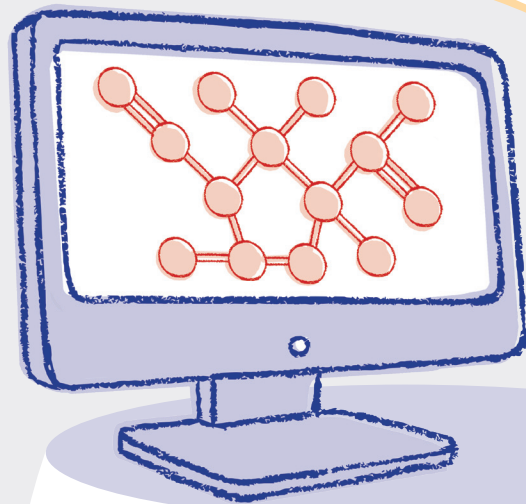
Many common foods contain proteins.



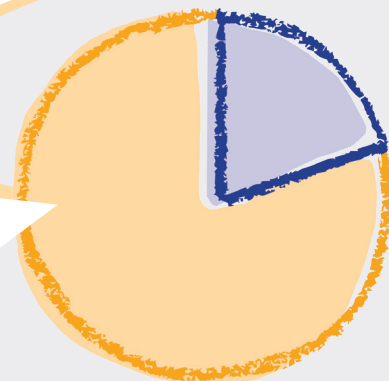
These include:

Pet Food & Treats
Meat
Wheat & Grains
Fruit & Vegetables
Dairy

These protein molecules can be allergens for sensitive dogs.

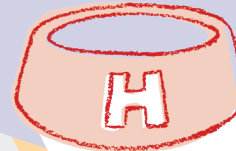


In fact
1 in 5
allergic reactions
are food related.

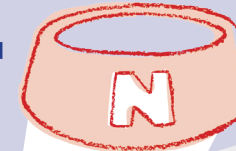


To diagnose a food allergy, an elimination diet trial is needed

Hydrolyzed Protein Diet



or



Novel Ingredient Diet

Take it slow.



Allow 1 week
for transition.

50% of food-allergic
dogs respond in
4 weeks.

95% of food-
allergic dogs
respond in
8 weeks.

A **50% to
100%**

Improvement
may be seen
if a food allergy
is present.

These common
items can be
the reason for
elimination diet
trials to fail:



Cheese, Rawhide & Antlers,
Gelatin Pills, Flavoured or
Chewable Medicine, Joint
Supplements, Fatty Acids
& Fish oils, Flavoured
Toothpaste, Treats, Dropped
Food, and Unwashed Dishes,
Bowls & Cutlery



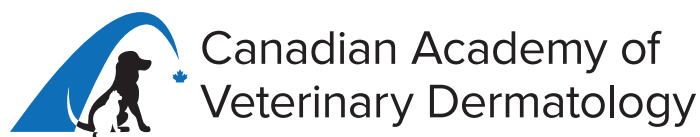
12 Tips for Success

It takes patience and effort to complete an elimination diet trial. Your persistence – along with these tips – can make a world of difference to your pet's quality of life.

- 1. Take it slow.** Don't switch to the new food overnight. It's a recipe for refusal and stomach upset. Take at least one week (or longer) to make the transition, starting with a very small amount of the new food on day one. Start the eight-week countdown on the first day you feed only the elimination diet.
- 2. Ask for help.** Call your veterinary team if you encounter food refusal, diarrhea, or any other problems. Veterinary diets are guaranteed, so the food can be returned and replaced with another if your dog doesn't like it.
- 3. Reward your dog.** Make the food into a treat by putting it into your dog's cookie jar or in a food dispensing toy. If your dog gets food from the kitchen counter or table, have a stash of the food at these locations. Ensure that any container used is thoroughly cleaned and only used to hold the recommended prescription diet. Ask your veterinary team for other tips on rewarding your dog.
- 4. Control food access.** Feed your dog separately from other pets and don't give in to begging behaviour for treats.
- 5. Don't mix and match.** Stick to one type of food during the trial. No one food is 100% hypoallergenic for every dog, so feeding more than one type increases the chance of "missing" a food allergy.
- 6. Account for medications.** If you struggle to give oral medications to your pet, ask your veterinarian about alternatives such as injections or topically applied treatments, or even delaying the diet trial.
- 7. Let everyone know.** Your dog may have an entourage: children, neighbours, dog walkers, dog daycare staff, pet store staff, and members of your family. They need to know about the diet trial.
- 8. Plan ahead.** Purchase the food well in advance of when you will run out.
- 9. Stay clean.** Keep the food in its original packaging, or thoroughly wash the container you use for storing the food.
- 10. Keep track.** Keep a calendar of your pet's symptoms, medications, and food.
- 11. Don't panic.** If you make a mistake, just record it on the calendar and keep going with the diet trial.
- 12. Go the distance.** For the sake of your dog's health, stick with the trial for the whole eight weeks. Call your veterinary team with questions, or to ask for help.



Make sure
EVERYONE
knows your
dog is on an
elimination diet



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