

Food Trial Instructions

For Dogs and Cats

WHAT ARE « FOOD ALLERGY » AND « FOOD INTOLERANCE » IN PEOPLE?

A «food allergy» is an abnormal response of the immune system to one or several specific foods. These reactions are associated with the rapid onset of symptoms, usually within a few minutes to a few hours after ingesting the offending food (immediate-type hypersensitivity). Food allergy patterns in adults differ somewhat from those in children. The most common foods to cause allergies in adults are fish, crustaceans, mollusks, nuts (peanuts, walnuts and other tree nuts), and chicken eggs. Adults usually do not lose their allergies over time. In children, chicken eggs, cow milk, peanuts, soy and wheat are the main culprits. Children typically outgrow their allergies to cow milk, chicken egg, soy and wheat, while allergies to nuts, fish and crustaceans usually are not outgrown.

Many people have food allergy-like symptoms (nausea, diarrhea, bloating or another unpleasant reaction) to something they eat. Such reactions do not involve the immune system and are called «food intolerance».

WHAT IS A « CUTANEOUS ADVERSE FOOD REACTION » IN COMPANION ANIMALS?

The exact mechanisms of food allergy/intolerance are not fully understood in pets. Contrary to people, these reactions can be quite delayed in time, usually taking days to a few weeks to develop (delayed-type hypersensitivity). Therefore, the all-encompassing term «cutaneous adverse food reaction» is preferred in veterinary medicine. Cutaneous manifestations (itching, otitis, and skin infections) are often accompanied with digestive signs (vomiting, diarrhea, flatulence, increased fecal frequency) and are rarely outgrown.



WHAT FOODS ARE INCRIMINATED IN COMPANION ANIMALS?

Only a small variety of foods (mainly animal proteins and a few grains) are clearly implicated in dogs and cats according to the current veterinary medical literature. Adverse reactions to chicken, beef, dairy products (cow milk, cheese and yogurt) and wheat account for over 75% of all the reported cases in dogs. In this species, adverse reactions to chicken egg, soy, lamb, fish and corn are reported much less frequently, while reactions to rice and duck are rare. In cats, adverse reactions to chicken, chicken egg, beef, dairy products and fish account for over 90% of all the reported cases. There is no scientific evidence of naturally-occurring peanut and tree nuts allergy in dogs. Therefore, giving these foods to a dog is probably acceptable.

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WHAT IS A FOOD TRIAL? WHY DO I NEED TO START ONE?

We suspect that your pet may have developed a cutaneous adverse reaction to one or several ingredients present in the current diet or treats. Recognizing the exact cause of adverse food reactions in dogs and cats can be difficult. The only way to diagnose a cutaneous adverse food reaction is to strictly feed a new diet for several weeks. This process is called a food trial (also known as elimination diet trial).

By the end of the food trial, a food challenge may be performed. This would involve re-introducing the previous diet and treats. Subsequent increase in itching, scratching or licking would confirm a cutaneous adverse food reaction and, therefore, your pet will need to be kept on a strictly restricted diet in the future.

WHAT COMMERCIAL DIET SHOULD I FEED?

Three types of diets may be used. The first type is a veterinary «**novel**» diet, which means that your pet has not eaten this protein source in the past (or at least very infrequently). Therefore, an accurate dietary history is essential for a successful outcome. Examples of protein sources include venison, rabbit, pork, kangaroo or fish while recommended carbohydrate sources include sweet potato, white potato or green pea.

The second type of diet, a veterinary «**hydrolysed**» diet, contains a protein that has been broken down by enzymes to be so small that it should not, in theory, stimulate the immune system. Examples of hydrolysed proteins include chicken, feather protein or soy.

The third type of diet is a complete and balanced «**homemade**» diet. Please inquire if you wish to feed such diet. We can provide detailed recipes and vitamin/mineral supplements. We can also consult with a veterinary nutritionist if your pet has concurrent disease(s).

Please only use the diet that was prescribed. Even though many commercial diets sold over-the-counter may claim to be «hypoallergenic» or «for sensitive skin», it is important to realize these claims have no official meaning. They can be misleading because the pet food companies do not legally have to list every ingredient on the label.

HOW SHOULD I PROCEED WITH THE FOOD TRIAL?

We recommend that you start a food trial using a commercial diet. In order to determine if your pet has a food allergy, this diet must be strictly maintained for a **minimum of 8 weeks**. You may not see complete relief from itching, scratching or licking, but you should see some improvement. This improvement may be slow. Patience and determination are essential for success.

It is very important that you adhere strictly to the following guidelines:

1. In order to avoid a digestive upset, please make the diet change from the current diet to the new diet gradually over a week, according to the chart and diagram below.

TRANSITION SCHEDULE							
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Old Diet	75%	75%	50%	50%	25%	25%	-
New Diet	25%	25%	50%	50%	75%	75%	100%



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2. **We emphasize that nothing else is to pass the pet's lips during the trial.** For greater clarity: this means no flavoured vitamin supplements, chew toys, commercial treats (bones, pig ears, rawhide chews, biscuits), snacks and table scraps. You may use the new diet as a treat. For example, you can use some kibble as a treat if you use a dry formulation. If a canned diet is fed, you can either make meatballs by rolling the food in your hands or bake slices into dry cookies. In doubt, please ask us about other acceptable treats that can be used during the duration of the food trial (slices of dried sweet potato treats, carrots, broccoli, apples etc.).

3. **Do not use bread, cheese, Pill Pockets, sausages or meat to disguise oral medications.** You can use the canned diet (if available) to make hand-rolled meatballs. You can also use boiled cubes of sweet potatoes to mask the medication.

4. **All family members and visitors should comply with the food trial.**

5. Eating another pet's food or feces will disrupt the food trial. Try to monitor the pets or separate the pets when they are fed. Stools will need to be picked up and bagged immediately. Put cat food out of the dog's reach or feed cats in a separate room. Avoid or stop free feeding all pets in the household in order to control food access.

6. Cats should ideally be kept indoors to prevent hunting.

7. If your pet receives a flavoured medication (chewable heartworm/ flea pills; flavoured antibiotics; flavoured vitamin, mineral, joint or coat supplement), please have those changed to non-flavoured form or a topical applied to the skin between the shoulder blades (Advantage Multi, Advantage, Revolution).

8. **Make sure you have enough food for a minimum of 8 weeks.** It is important not to have breaks during the food trial in order to facilitate the interpretation of results.

9. **Please contact us and ask us for instructions if:**

- **The change of diet causes vomiting or diarrhea.**
- **Your pet refuses to eat the new diet.**
- **Your pet goes more than 3 days without a bowel movement.**
- **Your pet appears to lose weight.**

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS IF THE COMMERCIAL DIET TRIAL FAILS?

A small percentage of truly food allergic pets may remain undiagnosed if a commercially prepared diet is used, as they may in fact be allergic to food additives (food dyes, emulsifiers, stabilizers, flavorings, taste enhancers, and preservatives). These patients may require a second food trial with a homemade diet.

It is also possible that your pet suffers from a more common type of allergy called atopic dermatitis. Testing for environmental allergens and specific treatments such as oral oclacitinib (Apoquel), oral cyclosporine (Atopica), or immunotherapy (desensitization, allergy shots or allergy drops) may be needed.

If you have any questions about these guidelines, please do not hesitate to call or email us.

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