

Elimination Diet Trial Information

What is a Cutaneous Adverse Food Reaction?

If a dog or cat has a food allergy it can often manifest as problems with the skin or ears (itching, licking or chewing excessively, recurrent ear infections, skin infections). Unlike with humans, our pets often need to be on a food for an extended period of time (weeks to months) before exhibiting signs of an allergic reaction. It is not typically a new food that triggers a skin reaction.

The most common foods that trigger allergic reactions are actually proteins (chicken, beef or dairy products) as opposed to grains. Grain allergies in pets are very uncommon and we do not recommend grain free diets at all unless expressly recommended by a veterinary dermatologist due to the link between grain free diets and dilated cardiomyopathy heart disease in dogs.

Why do we need a diet trial?

Based on your pet's exam, we suspect that your pet may have developed a reaction to one or more ingredients present in the current diet or treats. The only way to diagnose a cutaneous adverse food reaction is to strictly feed a specifically veterinarian prescribed 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 certain foods or treats one at a time for a prescribed time period to assess how the skin reacts over a time period. Subsequent increases 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 are the diet options that can be used?

Three types of diets may be used.

The first type of diet that can be used and the one we recommend the most is a "**Hydrolyzed**" diet. A hydrolyzed diet means the proteins have been dismantled into small enough pieces so that the immune system should not be able recognize it has something that should cause a reaction.

Hydrolyzed diets are prescription only diets. **Options for hydrolyzed diets include Royal Canin Ultamino, Royal Canin HP, Purina Elementals, Purina HA or Hills ZD.**

The second diet possibility is a **novel protein trial**, which means that your pet has not eaten this protein source in the past. 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. There are prescription diet options for these novel proteins and they are safest option (**Hills d/d, Royal Canin PR, Royal Canin PW, Royal Canin PD**)

The third type of diet is a complete and balanced homemade diet. Homemade diets need to be designed by board verified veterinary nutritionists otherwise they will be unbalanced and lack nutrients vital for longterm health. There is a website that allows you to start designing a homemade diet (<https://secure.balanceit.com/ez/index.php?rotator=NewEz>) and sells a nutrient balancer mix based on the recipe that is a possibility as well.

Though trying a variety of over the counter diets may sound appealing, there is no ideal over the counter diet for a food trial. There may be additional ingredients not included on the label and multiple proteins are run through the processing plants which could cause cross contamination with ingredients that could create an adverse reaction.

Directions for the Food Trial

1. Gradually transition from old diet to new diet over a course of 7-10 days
2. We emphasize that nothing else is to pass the pet's lips during the trial. For greater clarity: this means no flavored vitamin supplements, chew toys, commercial treats (bones, pig ears, rawhide chews, biscuits), snacks and table scraps. You may use the new diet as a treats. 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.
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). Oral Bravecto is hydrolyzed pork so it typically is a safe option. Unflavored Heartgard is an option as well as topical Revolution for heartworm prevention.
8. Make sure you have enough food for a minimum of 6 weeks. It is important not to have breaks during the food trial in order to facilitate the interpretation of results. The food trial will continue for 6-8 weeks. Please schedule a recheck appointment at the 6 week mark to develop the next steps if all is going well.

If your pet does not improve after a strict elimination diet trial then we can explore other possibilities for dermatologic disease.