

Food Allergies in Pets

How do food allergies happen?

Food allergies affect both dogs and cats. A food allergy occurs when a pet's immune system mistakenly identifies a particular food ingredient as harmful. It then creates defensive antibodies to fight the invading enemy (the food). The antibodies create inflammation in the body, causing symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

Primary food allergy symptoms are itchy skin affecting the face, feet, ears, forelegs, armpits and the area around the anus. Nausea and vomiting might also be signs of allergies. Other potential symptoms include chronic or recurrent ear infections, yeast infections, hair loss, excessive scratching, hot spots, and skin infections that respond to antibiotics but reoccur after antibiotics are discontinued. There is evidence that pets with food allergies may have increased incidence of bowel movements.

How are food allergies caused?

Some ingredients are more likely to cause food allergies than others. Potential culprits include proteins such as chicken, beef, dairy products, lamb and eggs. Grains (especially corn, wheat, soy) are often sources of allergies. It is no coincidence that these ingredients are often over-used. The body can become sensitized if the pet is fed the same food over and over.

Relieving the allergic response

The treatment for food allergies is avoidance. Switch the pet's diet to a novel source of protein and carbohydrate for 6 to 12 weeks. A novel food source is protein and carbohydrate that the animal has never eaten before. Consider grain free foods as the best option. Treats should have the same or similar protein and carbohydrate as the food, or are "safe" alternatives, such as frozen green beans, carrots, apple slices, banana slices. Avoid flavored medications and try to do absolutely nothing but the special food and water. In addition, the pet should not be allowed to roam, which may result in having access to food or garbage. Once the offending ingredients have been identified through a food trial, then they are eliminated from the diet.

How to avoid food allergies

Veterinarian Dr. Karen Becker suggests that diversity is critical in pet food, to avoid allergic responses. There is no one food for perfect health, but instead choose diverse foods for your pets as you do for yourself. She states that dogs and cats do not have carbohydrate requirements, so the less grains in foods, the less potentially reactive and allergenic the diet becomes. Dr. Becker suggests switching foods every 2 - 3 months to avoid incidence of food allergies, with a several day transition of mixing the foods.

Contact us with any questions!

The staff at the Holistic Pet Center

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