



Hypoallergenic Dietary Trial

A hypoallergenic dietary trial is often recommended if we think your pet has a component of food allergy contributing to their ear or skin problems. Allergies cause inflammation in the skin and ears, making the skin environment very abnormal. Often we see that the skin is red, has scabs or brown-stained fur from licking or chewing and notice that the pet is itchy.

It is normal for tiny bacteria and yeast to live on the skin but in a healthy pet they exist in balance with each other. On skin that is inflamed from allergies, these tiny microbes can multiply too much (overgrow) and cause infections. Often we see rashes, little pimples, scaly/crusty areas and lots of wax and stuff in the ears. The ear canals may be swollen and painful. We may decide to prescribe medication to beat back the invading hordes of microbes but this is only a temporary fix! We need to get rid of the underlying inflammation to prevent the microbes from overgrowing again. Otherwise, when the medication is discontinued, we will be right back where we started!

Symptoms of food allergies are usually seen all year long. Usually, an animal is reacting inappropriately to a protein (meat) or carbohydrate (grain or sugar) component of the food. To test if this is the case, we recommend feeding a special diet for at least 12 weeks. We are happy to recommend a prescription diet for this purpose or you can cook for your pet for the time of the feeding trial. Please know that commonly available pet foods from pet-stores and grocery stores may not be appropriate, no matter what the packaging says on the label! Please check with us before you feed anything that we have not recommended.

Instructions for the feeding trial:

- Feed **ONLY** the special diet and water for 12 weeks. Your pet **cannot** have **ANYTHING** else: no treats, no table scraps, no cookies and no cheese or meat to mix medications with! **NOTHING BUT THE SPECIAL DIET AND WATER MUST PASS YOUR PET'S LIPS** for 12 weeks. Other foods and treats may be introduced at a later time and we can discuss this with you when the diet trial is over.
- At the end of the diet trial, we are hoping to see a substantial improvement in the skin and ears. The aim of the trial is to prevent these problems from coming





back as much as possible. If it works, your pet should need to be seen for ear and skin problems much less frequently.

A hypoallergenic dietary trial is harder to manage than you might think! If your pet eats a scrap of anything else, the 12 week period starts over at that time! Creative problem solving may be needed to prevent your pet from eating things he/she shouldn't have.

Here are some tips to help you:

- Lock the pet away while the family is eating, so they can't eat anything that falls on the floor. Sweep or vacuum after dinner if necessary.
- Make sure food for other pets is kept out of reach and they are separated from each other by walls and doors at feeding time. Alternatively, you may be able to feed everyone the same diet but please check with us in case this strategy is not appropriate for your other pets.
- Warn your relatives and friends about what you are doing so they don't give food to your pet unknowingly. Lock your pet away when you have visitors if you can't trust your visitors not to feed them.
- If you have a pet that eats everything off the ground when you walk outdoors with them, consider investing in a basket muzzle for the period of the food trial (dogs only). A basket muzzle looks like a cage that goes over the nose. A dog can pant in one but can't get anything into their mouth. Dogs need to pant to prevent them from overheating which is why other types of muzzles can't be used when they are exercising!
- Make sure your garbage is locked away in pet-proof containers and make it a policy not to leave food anywhere your pet could get at it....on counters, coffee tables etc.

