



AVENUES PET CLINIC  
5520 Yellowstone Road  
Cheyenne, WY 82009

Telephone: (307) 778-3007  
Fax: (307) 638-7718  
www.avenuespetclinic.com



## Food Allergies

### What Signs can be seen with a Food Allergy?

Many people erroneously assume itching due to food allergy requires a recent diet change of some sort. In fact, the opposite is true. *Food allergy requires time to develop; most animals have been eating the offending food for years with no trouble.* A food allergy is a reaction to food that involves the body's immune system. It is usually always a protein particle in the food that is responsible for reactions.

Your dog may itch, lick, and chew paws, flank, groin, neck, and ears. The itching can be during all seasons. A small percentage of food allergy dogs may only have chronic otitis.

The dog may also have some gastrointestinal signs such as chronic vomiting, diarrhea, belching, and frequent bowel movements. Food allergy dogs often have both varying degrees of skin signs and gastrointestinal problems that persist.

### How Does your Veterinarian Select a Diet for a Food Allergy Trial?

The diet selected will contain a "novel" protein and carbohydrate source meaning that your dog has not eaten this protein source in the past. Your veterinarian may recommend a food allergy trial based on skin and possible gastrointestinal signs.

### What Diets are currently available for a Food Allergy Trial?

Commercial diets sold "over the counter" may claim to be "hypoallergenic" or "good for sensitive skin." It is important to realize these claims have no official meaning. These diets can be misleading because the pet food companies do not have to list every ingredient on the label. It is best to use the diet your veterinarian has selected for a proper food allergy test.

Diets that are used in food allergy trials are in one of these categories:

- Prescription Diets
- Low Antigen Diets
- Home Made Diets

Prescription diets are made by pet food companies to specifically and always contain the same ingredients. These diets are only available through veterinarians. They are formulated to treat a medical condition, in this case, food allergies.

The protein(s) in a diet that can be responsible for food allergy signs are called antigens. In these diets, the protein has been formulated (hydrolyzed) to be so small that it will not stimulate the immune system. The diet may also have used small carbohydrates as well to avoid the potential immune response to proteins in the carbohydrate component of the diet.

It is important that during the diet trial no unnecessary medications be given. No edible chew toys (such as rawhides or bones) should be given. Treats must be based on the same food sources as the test diet. (Beware of rice cakes, though, as wheat is commonly used as a filler.) Chewable heartworm preventives should be replaced with tablets.

Occasionally home cooking ends up being necessary.

Food allergic animals require 8 to 10 weeks to respond. Eighty percent of food allergic dogs will have responded to diet trial at least partially by six weeks. Some animals may even require a longer period.

## What to do if the Diet is Unsuccessful?

Generally, an unsuccessful food trial is strongly suggestive that an inhalant allergy is really the primary problem, but there are some other considerations that should at least be mentioned:

- Are you certain that the dog received no other food or substances orally during the trial? Your pet may require a longer diet trial.
- Are you certain regarding the factor that pointed us toward the food allergy?
- If your pet has not been biopsied, now may be a good time.
- If an inhalant allergy has risen to the top of the list, symptomatic relief either via medication, special baths, or allergy shots will likely be necessary.
- Chronic itchiness can be extremely uncomfortable and prompt relief is the goal.