



Matthew J. Ryan Veterinary Hospital
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 Clinical Dermatology & Allergy Service
 Philadelphia, PA 19104

Food Elimination Diet

Your dermatologist suspects that your pet may have an adverse reaction to food (food allergy). Unfortunately, there is no blood or skin test that can accurately diagnose this allergy. The only way to diagnose a food allergy is to feed your pet a food elimination diet for 10 to 12 weeks. A 50% reduction in your dog’s or cat’s licking, scratching, or chewing is expected but may occur very late in the trial in some animals. The trial often has to be extended beyond this time to allow management of skin and ear infections.

The food elimination diet should consist of a protein source that your pet has never eaten before, along with a unique carbohydrate source. The protein sources usually used are rabbit, duck, ostrich, goat, pork, or white fish. Carbohydrate sources include sweet potato or oats. Other diets that can be used include diets containing unique hydrolyzed proteins. Your pet will be started on a food trial using a prescription diet that is a commercially prepared and completely nutritious diet or a home-cooked diet. A small percentage of truly food allergic animals may remain undiagnosed with a commercially prepared diet or need to be trialed with a different diet.

If your pet seems hungry, you may feed more of this unique diet using the kibble as a treat with a dry formulation or by making small meatballs with the food as treats if you are using a wet preparation. **DO NOT** feed novel treats, rawhide bones, pig ears, table scraps, flavored toothpastes, or any chewable medications (such as flavored heartworm prevention) during the food elimination trial. Please remember not to use cheese or meat to disguise oral medications. If you need to give treats, you may provide a vegetable source that your pet has never eaten before, but it is essential to limit all novel items ingested by your pet so the fewer vegetables used the better. For example, you may use canned or cooked yams as a treat to mask medication, but limit your animal to this one vegetable. Please contact your pet’s dermatologist for suggestions about acceptable vegetables or ideas about increasing the palatability of the food.

Following the dietary trial, a structured food challenge will be performed that involves reintroducing the previous diet and treats as directed by a dermatologist. This diet is a diagnostic test, and your pet will only be on it for a short period of time. The goal of doing this trial is to find a commercially prepared diet that your dog can tolerate. Please be patient, and follow the above directions. The end result of the trial will provide valuable information that we can use to make your pet much more comfortable.

