

## UTCVM DERMATOLOGY SERVICE

# Food Allergies

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Certain animals have the potential to develop a specific sensitivity (allergy) to a component of their diet. It could be a major ingredient such as beef, dairy, wheat, corn, soy, chicken, eggs, or a chemical such as a preservative, stabilizer or food dye.

## Signs of a food allergy

The most common clinical sign of a food allergy is itching. The animal may scratch anywhere on its body. As an owner, you may notice hair loss, redness of the skin, and other signs of chewing, scratching or rubbing. Skin and ear infections can be common problems in food allergic patients.

## Perscription diet

The diagnosis of a food allergy is made by feeding your animal a type of food that he has never had or has only had infrequently. It may take as long as 10 weeks (about 2 and a half months) after the hypoallergenic specific prescription diet is started to see improvement in the skin condition (itchiness and redness). Unfortunately, one cannot simply switch brands of commercial dog food since most over-the-counter foods share similar ingredients (cross-contamination of protein sources, dyes, preservatives and stabilizers). Recommendations for diets to be used for the diet trial will be made specifically based on your pet's previous diet history.

## Food challenge

After the dietary food trial is complete (usually 10 weeks), a food challenge will be performed to confirm or rule out the diagnosis of food allergy. If a food allergic animal is fed a food that they are sensitive to, the allergic symptoms usually occur within hours to days after eating the offending food.

## Dietary requirements

For the next 10 weeks, **your pet is to be fed only the diet provided**. No other vitamin supplements, dog or cat treats, table food, rawhide chew toys, etc. are to be given. If you are using a chewable heartworm preventive or other flavored medication, please inform us so we can make other recommendations for the duration of the elimination diet trial. If your animal does manage to obtain any other food, it may be necessary to restart the entire process again.

## Other possible allergies

Occasionally, an animal will have a food allergy in combination with other allergies. Consequently, it is important to note any differences in your animal's condition while being fed a hypoallergenic diet. Any decrease in chewing, scratching or rubbing or any visible change in your animal's skin should be recorded.

**Please call/email the UTCVM Dermatology Service  
with any questions or concerns.**