

# Food Allergy

A food allergy is a reaction by the body's immune system in response to particular foods or food ingredients. The most common causes for both dogs and cats are proteins found in beef, chicken, dairy products, eggs, wheat, corn and soy. In cats, fish is also a common cause. Some breeds seem more likely to develop food allergies, implying there can be a genetic predisposition.

Food allergies develop only after the immune system has been previously exposed to a food. In fact, most dogs and cats have been eating a particular food for months to years before a reaction to it is first noticed.

## **Common Signs associated with a food allergy:**

- Itching
- Dry or crusty skin
- Recurring ear infections
- Hair loss
- One area of skin can be affected or spread over various regions (ears, face, paws, anus, groin, armpit, etc.)
- Diarrhea or vomiting

## **How to determine if a pet has a food allergy:**

It is important to provide a complete list of all things that your pet eats including any foods, treats or medications.

To diagnose this disorder, the suspected food ingredient must be eliminated from the diet for approximately 10-12 weeks. This is most often done by feeding a prescription diet specially formulated for pets with food allergies. These diets are specially formed using a single purified carbohydrate and protein source either undetectable by the immune system or completely new to your pet's diet. It is important that your pet has never eaten any ingredient in the new diet before and that this is the "ONLY" diet offered during the trial period. It is also important to avoid certain medications that could contain the ingredients we are trying to eliminate from the diet.

If your pet improves while on this diet, then a food allergy is the likely cause of the symptoms. At this time, they are "challenged" by reintroducing the ingredient that has been eliminated from the diet. If symptoms worsen or return, then that ingredient is the trigger and must never be fed again.

## **After the diagnosis:**

Avoid giving the allergenic food in any amount. Even a small amount can cause full symptoms for days to weeks.

Although one food or food ingredient may be identified as an allergen, allergies to other foods can develop later in life. Please call our office if symptoms return or your pet develops new signs.

