

## If Your Pet Suffers Itchy Skin Consistently, Suspect This First

This can make your poor pet absolutely miserable. Some even scratch themselves sore. You may blame it on this well-known trigger. But often it's the other elephant in the room. Yet you miss it, so you never nip it in the bud. Fortunately, this test can tell you which it is.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If your pet is itchy year round, or meets other certain criteria, it's possible his allergy is food-related and not a sensitivity to pollen or another environmental allergen
- If you suspect your dog or cat is allergic to something in her diet, it's important to determine the specific food(s) she's reacting to
- Once the problem food(s) have been identified, a novel diet should be implemented and introduced to give the GI tract and immune system a two-to-three month rest
- The next step is to slowly reintroduce other foods one at a time while closely monitoring your pet's response
- A customized diet and supplement protocol designed by a holistic or integrative veterinarian is necessary to fully resolve existing food sensitivities and GI inflammation, and prevent future problems

**Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published October 21, 2017.**

Pets with environmental allergies tend to suffer in the spring and fall, but what about dogs and cats who seem itchy regardless of the season? In those cases, it can be something in the pet's diet that's causing his miserable itching.

Because most allergies in dogs and cats, regardless of the source, tend to manifest in itchy, inflamed skin, it can be difficult to know in the early stages whether an animal has an environmental (seasonal) or food allergy. (For the record, while the term "food allergy" is commonly used, true food allergies in pets are rare, and are actually food intolerances or sensitivities versus allergies.)

Pets with food allergies typically have symptoms such as itchy skin, skin and ear infections, and sometimes, vomiting and diarrhea. Unlike humans, who almost always have gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms with a food allergy, dogs and cats are much more likely to develop skin problems first. There are certain clues that your dog's or cat's allergies may be food-related, including:

- Your pet is less than 6 months of age, or his allergies didn't appear until he was over 6 years of age
- Your pet is a breed prone to food intolerances, for example, Siamese and Birman cats
- Your pet has received steroid therapy for allergies (which are NOT recommended), but the treatment hasn't provided symptom relief

- Your pet has sores or skin damage around the neck area, especially under the collar, and his whole head is itchy
- Your pet is experiencing GI symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea and/or constipation

## How Food Allergies Develop

When your dog or cat has a food allergy, her immune system perceives that something in her diet is attacking her body. To deal with the “threat,” the immune system launches a counterattack just as it would against a real danger, for example, an infectious agent. Certain substances in the diet are more likely to trigger the immune system than others, and unfortunately, the nutrient your carnivorous pet needs most — protein — is very often the culprit. Those of us in the holistic community understand this, but find it hard to explain.

Although no research has been published on why carnivores become allergic to their natural evolutionary diet, we believe foreign contaminants may be the culprit. Growth hormones, antibiotics and chemical residues may actually be the triggers rather than the protein in the food.

But because 99.9% of pet foods use conventionally raised, factory farmed meats and only the leftover, rendered pieces and parts, this will continue to be a problem for almost all susceptible pets. Often, it isn't until the GI tract has been significantly compromised by the inflammation caused by an allergic response that your pet begins to show symptoms of digestive disturbance.

## Identifying Food Intolerances

The NutriScan food intolerance test is recommended for pets over the age of 1 year who are dealing with a food sensitivity. NutriScan was developed by veterinarian Dr. Jean Dodds, and tests for 24 of the most common foods dogs and kitties eat, including:

- Beef
- Chicken
- Millet
- Soy
- Pork
- Rabbit
- Venison (deer)
- Barley
- Rice
- Sweet potato
- Salmon
- Quinoa
- Chicken eggs
- Wheat

- Potato
- Oatmeal
- Lamb
- Lentils (includes peas)
- Corn
- Turkey
- Peanuts/peanut butter
- Cow's milk
- Duck
- White-colored ocean fish (e.g., menhaden, pollack, herring, sardines)

NutriScan is a salivary test that helps remove the guesswork involved in food elimination trials. It's important to note that NutriScan doesn't test for food allergies, but rather sensitivities and intolerances. As Dr. Dodds explains:

*"These are different body immune responses. Food allergy is a more immediate reaction mediated by production of IgE and IgG antibodies. Food sensitivity and intolerance, by contrast, measures a more delayed body response to offending foods by measuring production of IgA and IgM antibodies primarily in mucosal secretions from the bowel.*

*Antibodies to IgA measure the immune response to certain foods in secretions like saliva that have occurred over the last [two] years. Antibodies to IgM measure the body's primary immune response to a recent exposure of certain foods within the last [six] months."*<sup>1</sup>

Pets fed the same food day in and day out for a period of months or years often develop a sensitivity to the protein source. But grains and vegetables can also be culprits. If the food is inexpensive and highly processed, chances are the meat is loaded with antibiotics and hormones, which can also cause the immune system to overreact.

These dogs and cats also often grow sensitive to allergenic ingredients in the food, typically grains and other carbohydrates. Many grains have been genetically modified and sprayed with glyphosates, which can compromise your pet's gut barrier and contribute to leaky gut and dysbiosis. NutriScan test results can often identify the specific ingredient(s) in your pet's food that are causing a problem, which makes it much easier to customize a novel diet to resolve the issue.

## **Interrupting the Allergic Cycle with a Novel Diet**

When your pet is having an allergic reaction to some part of her diet, her body needs a break from the food she's been eating. This gives the immune system an opportunity to settle down, which usually results in a reduction in symptoms.

After determining your dog's or cat's food sensitivities with a NutriScan test, the next step is to introduce a novel diet to start the healing process. Traditional veterinarians sometimes call these diets hypoallergenic, but there's really no true hypoallergenic diet, because any animal can react to any food at any time.

Switching to a novel diet involves transitioning your pet to a different food containing ingredients her body isn't familiar with. It's very important that both the primary protein and carbohydrate sources be identified in your pet's current food so we can select a different food without those ingredients.

Switching just the main protein or carb in a novel diet isn't as effective as switching both. In addition to switching the protein and carb sources, it's important to also reduce or eliminate grains and filler ingredients (as well as synthetic nutrients) that often play a role in allergic reactions and inflammatory conditions.

Pets with food intolerances also do best on an ultra-low-starch diet. Because manufacturers don't have to list carbohydrate content on the label, you have to calculate it yourself. It's worth taking the time to do this before choosing a diet so you can avoid further issues down the road.

## Returning Your Pet to a Regular Diet

A pet with food sensitivities should remain on a novel diet for a minimum of two months and preferably three, to allow the body time to clear out the allergenic substances and begin the detoxification process. During this three-month period you can also address dysbiosis (leaky gut syndrome, which results from the allergic inflammatory response in the GI tract) with the appropriate **probiotics** and nutraceuticals necessary to address the root cause of the problem.

Because each case of food intolerance is unique, a custom formulated protocol created by a **holistic or integrative veterinarian** is recommended. Once a patient has completed two to three months on a novel diet, other foods are slowly reintroduced one at a time, and the animal's response is closely monitored. Some pets show dramatic improvement on the new diet; in those cases, don't rush the reintroduction of food that could be problematic.

When the dog or cat is stable and doing well, pet parents should find at least one and preferably two other protein sources their pet tolerates well so that every three to six months, they can rotate proteins and hopefully avoid further allergic reactions.

In addition, the cleaner the proteins, the less chance your pet will become sensitive to them over time. Clean animal proteins are nontoxic. For example, food animals raised on a natural diet (grass fed, not factory farmed), as well as hormone-free animals, are better food sources for sensitive pets.

During and after a novel diet, natural supplements are recommended to aid detoxification, relieve allergic symptoms and support your pet's immune system. Your holistic veterinarian can help you select the supplements most appropriate for your pet's individual needs.

## Sources and References

[Quad-City Times February 18, 2020](#)

<sup>1</sup> [NutriScan](#)

---