

## Elimination diet for dogs

If your dog is experiencing pruritus (think... allergies), ear infections, anal gland issues, licking of paws, gastrointestinal issues or other symptoms that may be related to a food intolerance/allergy, your practitioner will likely suggest a change in diet. There are pre-made options out there like **hypoallergenic** (low allergen content) or **anallergenic** (free of allergens) pet food. In that case, make sure to pick one with **hydrolyzed** proteins (protein molecules broken down to a size too small to be recognized by the body) or a **novel** protein (a protein the dog has not ingested before). For those wanting to feed fresh food or simply trying another option—an elimination diet might be indicated. Food allergy testing is rarely a reliable way to discover food allergies. Keep in mind that allergies to new foods can develop at any time, or could (in some occasions) go away by repairing the gut.

The most common food allergies in dogs are proteins, and usually to those who are commercially available in pet foods like beef, chicken, eggs, dairy, soy, or wheat gluten. Other substances, carbohydrates and additives can also be responsible. Below is a list of how to do an elimination diet for your dog:

- Choose a novel single protein diet (only containing one type of new protein e.g. rabbit) to follow for **6–8 weeks**. Keep in mind that some proteins can cross-react (if they react to chicken they may react to turkey too). It should be pre-made complete & balanced, or DIY preferably formulated by the help of a veterinary nutritionist. A limited ingredients list will limit the risk of an allergic/intolerant response. Your vet may prescribe medication to keep your dog comfortable as you are working out a diet that works. During this period, **NO OTHER FOOD ITEMS ALLOWED**; as this will delay or obscure the results. The only treats allowed are those of the same protein as the current diet, without any fillers (in this case e.g. freeze-dried rabbit parts).
- Some dogs with sensitive tummies will need a transition period of 1–2 weeks while slowly transitioning from the old food to the new. The 6–8 week period will start when the dog is fully weaned over to the new food. *Pre-, pro-, and postbiotics* might be helpful in the transitioning, as well as **digestive enzymes** (careful with the ingredients). **Slippery elm** or **marshmallow root** can be helpful for soft stools/diarrhea.
- If your dog is suffering from yeast overgrowth you may want to choose a diet with little to no carbohydrates, as yeast need sugar to grow.
- If after 6–8 weeks your pet is free of symptoms (even without medication), you can slowly reintroduce one new food item at the time to see how their body reacts. Try for example adding small bits of chicken to the diet over a few days. If there are no symptoms recurring, increase the amount of chicken and maybe even try meals with chicken as the only protein source over the next 2 weeks. If it works, you've got 2 "safe" proteins for now. If it doesn't, remove chicken entirely for the time being. 2 weeks after trying the new protein source, you can try the same procedure with a different food item,

and so on until you've made a map of current "safe" foods.

- If after 6–8 weeks on the novel protein, your pet still has symptoms, it may be that they are reacting to the ingredients in the diet. Try for another 6–8 weeks on a different novel protein.
- Beware of hidden ingredients that may be obscuring your results in e.g. kibble, treats or supplements. For example, meat meal = a mix of different proteins. Kibble and treats can easily contain pea or soy protein, different starches or fillers they can react to. Even supplements may be "beef flavoured" which could potentially trigger a dog with an allergy to beef.
- Additions to consider in an allergy dog are **omega-3 fatty acids**, **quercetin** (nature's benadryl), and **echinacea** to support the immune system. Allergy to these are uncommon but if unsure can introduce them one at a time during the elimination diet.