



Tips for a Successful Food Allergy Trial

Make sure a food trial is the right diagnostic test. Rule out fleas, ticks, contagious mites, bacterial infections, and yeast overgrowth.

If the patient does not have evidence of infection or infestation, make sure he or she has year-round pruritus and receives flea control. Pets with clear seasonal pruritus for just a few months likely have environmental allergies and a food trial is not indicated.

Make sure the client is willing and able. It is important to ask about possible reasons for noncompliance, such as other family members, parties or vacations, neighbors, access to food, walks, pet day-care, etc. Avoid starting a food trial during the Thanksgiving to New Year holiday season, if possible.

Request a list of the pet's food. This should include *everything* the patient eats, not only what is offered.

Begin the food trial with a transition week. This allows the patient to adjust to the new routine and diet and will indicate any "weak spots" in the trial.

Be sure the client understands that this is a strict diet. Ask the client to ensure that no dog treats, such as rawhides and flavored chew toys or flavored heartworm or flea-control products, are available to the pet. Also, ask about the patient's routine medications—you may need to prescribe alternative medications.

Use approved treats only!

Which diet? Over-the-counter specialty diets are not acceptable. Use only veterinary prescription diets (hydrolyzed or novel protein) or home-cooked diets.

Plan for an 8-week trial. If infections and parasites have been ruled out and controlled, the pet likely has year-round allergies. The majority of patients will respond in 6 to 8 weeks.

Assign "homework" to the client to monitor the patient's response. Ask the client to mark the severity of the pruritus every week using an analog scale.

Do a provocative food challenge. Diet trials take approximately 8 weeks and may coincide with pollen season, so challenge the patient with his or her previous diet to ensure that the diet has caused any positive effects. If the pruritus returns with similar severity when the patient is back on the old diet, this is consistent with food intolerance.

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