Eastside
Animal Hospital

Food Allergies

Food allergies can afflict any dog or cat. Symptoms include episodes of vomiting or regurgitation, diarrhea, red itchy skin, hair loss, rash, skin infections, constant licking or chewing paws, scratching or rubbing the face or ears, ear infections, anal gland infections, or local "hot spots." These signs mimic other types of allergic diseases, and most animals with food allergies have other types of allergies. This makes diagnosing food allergies complicated and challenging.

Animals with this problem are most often allergic to the protein in their diet. To become allergic, they must have been exposed to the protein for some time. Thus, these allergies most commonly show up when your pet is an adult and they have been eating the food for a significant period of time.

One way to diagnose this problem is with an elimination diet. This involves purchasing or making a special food, which has a unique protein that your pet's digestive system has never seen. It is important that no other food including treats, tablefood or rawhide chewies is offered. This includes flavorings, such as those found in heartgard and interceptor brands of heartworm prevention. This regimen is difficult, but is essential for a correct diagnosis. Even an occasional treat can make it seem like the diet isn't working.

The diet must be used for a minimum of 6-8 weeks. Then we offer a challenge by putting the pet back on its original diet. If the original symptoms come back, we know your pet has a food allergy. Often we never make it to the challenge phase, because of the improvement on the special diet. The diet can then be used as a part of an allergy control program for your pet.

An alternative method for making the diagnosis is blood testing. A sample can be sent to a pet allergy diagnostic lab to determine what your pet is allergic to. Then a diet is selected to avoid those food items.

Having a pet with food allergies can be a challenge. They will need on-going management and have ups and downs along the way.

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