



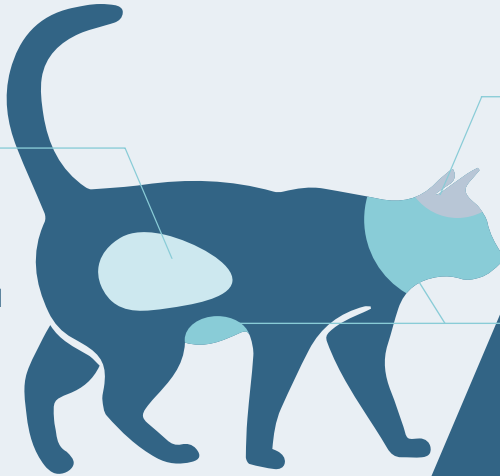
FOOD TRIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR CATS

WHAT ARE FOOD ALLERGIES AND FOOD INTOLERANCES?

Food allergies and food intolerances can both cause digestive symptoms and are triggered by a reaction to one or more ingredients in the cat's diet. The difference is that a food allergy involves the immune system in this reaction, whereas a food intolerance does not. Food allergies will also very commonly cause skin and ear symptoms, which may occur on their own or in combination with digestive signs.

DIGESTIVE SYMPTOMS

- Diarrhoea
- Loose stools
- Excess gas
- Jelly on/with stool
- Vomiting



EAR SYMPTOMS

Appearance: Skin lesions (including small raised bumps or raised plaques)
Behaviour: Itching

SKIN SYMPTOMS

Appearance: Skin lesions (including small raised bumps or raised plaques), hair loss
Behaviour: Itching (especially of head and neck), overgrooming

WHY HAS MY CAT BEEN PUT ON A FOOD TRIAL?

It is impossible to tell just from their symptoms whether a cat with skin signs has a food allergy, an allergy to something in their environment, or both, as they can look exactly the same. Likewise, there are many reasons for cats to have digestive symptoms. As part of the process to get a diagnosis for the symptoms your cat is displaying, it's important therefore to either rule-in or rule-out a food allergy. For cats with skin symptoms this is normally done after infections and ectoparasites (fleas, mites and lice) have already been ruled-out and / or treated. Those with digestive signs may have had blood tests and / or a sample of their stool sent for analysis first.

WHY CAN'T I JUST USE MEDICATION?

For some cats with food allergies, if you remove the problem foods from their diet their symptoms will completely resolve, stopping the need for life-long medication. Other cats with skin signs will have both a food allergy and other allergies in addition (usually to things in their environment), so you may only see a partial improvement when the problem foods are removed. This is still very beneficial though as allergy is a life-long condition and the dietary changes may reduce the amount of medication they need. Food allergies are common in cats with skin problems, so while it's important to recognise many cats will not improve during the dietary trial, the potential benefit for those that do makes it an essential part of the diagnostic work-up and well worth doing.

IS THERE NOT JUST A TEST TO DIAGNOSE FOOD ALLERGY?

The only way to diagnose a food allergy is by conducting a food trial, this in itself should be seen as a diagnostic test. However, there are blood tests available which can help to select what food to use for the trial. Like any diagnostic test, if a food trial is not run properly the results will be meaningless, which is why it is so important to follow the instructions completely.

WHAT DOES THE FOOD TRIAL ACTUALLY ENTAIL?

Feeding a very strict diet for 8 weeks. If the symptoms do improve, the original food is given again to see if the symptoms return; only then do we know it was the diet that caused the improvement, rather than something else (just a coincidence). Ideally, further investigation will then occur to identify which individual ingredients of the food are causing the reaction so these can be permanently removed from the diet.

WHAT DO I FEED MY CAT DURING THE TRIAL?

There are two types of dietary trial. A blood test can be used to help identify foods suitable to include for either type:

HOME-COOKED

This involves finding, then feeding, a totally 'novel' diet, avoiding all ingredients that your cat has previously eaten. To work out what is suitable, an accurate, full dietary history needs to be taken. Based upon this, a single protein source (e.g. a type of meat or fish) and a single carbohydrate source (e.g. potato, rice, pasta) and water are given and absolutely nothing else. Some cats will not eat the carbohydrate part so may need an all-protein diet.

This diet is not suitable long-term without supplementation as cats need both taurine and essential fatty acids in their diet (speak to your vet about this who will tailor it if necessary). You will need to either regularly prepare this diet freshly for your cat or batch cook and freeze.

HYDROLYSED DIET

These diets are not the same as hypoallergenic or 'skin sensitive' diets. In a hydrolysed diet, the components of the food have been broken down to be sufficiently small that it is very unlikely they will stimulate the cat's immune system and cause the food allergy symptoms.

These diets are specifically designed for the purpose of running food trials and are available as kibble or in tins/trays.



It's essential that nothing other than recommended food and water (and medications agreed by your vet) should pass your cat's lips for the duration of the diet trial, otherwise food allergy could be ruled out incorrectly

(See the attached information on common mistakes during dietary trials)

SUITABLE TREATS DURING THE DIET TRIAL

- For treats during the dietary trial use small amounts of the new agreed food.
- If using a hydrolysed diet soak kibble in water and then bake it to make your own treats.
- If using fresh food in a home-cooked diet make the treats from scratch rather than re-heating.

STARTING THE DIETARY TRIAL

To minimise the chance of a digestive upset, swap over gradually to the new diet over about 5-7 days. Slowly give more of the new diet and less of the old until it is completely replaced. If your cat totally stops eating this could be dangerous for them, so contact your practice for advice if they refuse the new diet or stop eating it. Likewise, if your cat has any digestive upset (vomiting / diarrhoea), seems to be losing weight, does not have a bowel movement for more than 24 hours or you are concerned for any other reason about the diet, please contact your vet.

MONITORING PROGRESS

It is helpful to note down every week how you feel your cat's symptoms are so we can track their progress. Useful things to jot down include; level of itchiness from 1-10, any changes in bowel habits, if they have eaten anything they shouldn't. (Please use the food trial diary on page 4).

DETAILS FOR YOUR CAT

Name of cat:

Selected diet:

Cat's current weight:

Amount to be fed daily: Home-cooked diet

Hydrolysed diet.....

Feed as indicated on packaging for cat's weight unless otherwise stated by your vet.

Date for next appointment:

COMMON MISTAKES DURING DIETARY TRIALS

FEEDING TREATS, CHEWS AND MEDICATIONS

- Nothing else should pass your cat's lips without your vets prior consent including: treats, flavoured medications, things to wrap unflavoured medication in to disguise it, supplements or dental chews. Please see page 2 for suitable treats to feed your cat.

ACCIDENTALLY CONTAMINATING THE DIET

- Take great care to wash bowls, serving scoops and your hands before preparing food to avoid stray proteins being passed on.
- Change to a ceramic, stainless steel or glass bowl (not plastic) if the clinical signs are predominantly around the muzzle and face.

DROPPED OR RAIDED FOOD

- Remove your cat from the kitchen when preparing food and dining area at meal times if they are in the habit of eating dropped food and make sure any spills are cleared up straight away.
- Do not let your cat lick the plates in the dishwasher.
- Ensure access to the bin is restricted and cupboards and feed bins are secure.

NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS

- Make sure that neighbours, pet sitters, friends and relatives who visit, all understand what food is to be fed to your cat to ensure the diet is strictly kept to.
- Consider waiting until you return to start the trial if you have a holiday planned soon.
- You could invest in a brightly coloured 'do not feed me' safety collar and tag which can also assist if your cat is visiting people you are unaware of for extra snacks.

HAVING MORE THAN ONE ANIMAL IN THE HOUSE

- Separate pets at meal times and clean out bowls afterwards to stop animals eating food intended for other pets.
- If they, or other household cats are grazers, consider feeding both on the new diet (check with your vet).

'NON-BELIEVERS' IN THE HOUSE SNEAKING THEM A SNACK

- Sit down and explain the 'rules' of the trial to everyone involved including those who visit the house or have any contact with your cat.
- Explain why the diet trial matters (the impact the condition is having on your cat).

STOPPING TOO SOON

- Some animals will take eight weeks or longer to show a positive response.
- It is important to persevere through to the agreed end date. Don't give up too soon!

HUNTING DOWN THEIR OWN FOOD

- If your cat is an active hunter it may be necessary to keep them indoors for the duration of the food trial. Speak to your vet about environmental enrichment to minimise boredom and stress during the trial.



DIET TRIAL DIARY Complete at the end of each week using the guidance notes below

AMOUNT OF ITCHING

Grade from 0 to 10, with 0 being a normal cat and 10 being constant itching regardless of what is happening around them.

NUMBER OF BOWEL MOVEMENTS

Estimate the average number of stools produced per day for that particular week.

STOOL QUALITY

Grade from 0 to 5, with 0 being what you would expect from a normal cat (well-formed stool, no jelly, brown colour) to 5 (diarrhoea, excessive amounts jelly).

ANY OTHER COMMENTS

Note in here any other observations about your cats behaviour or symptoms and also write down any accidental intake of food that is not part of the trial diet.

	AMOUNT OF ITCHING	NUMBER OF BOWEL MOVEMENTS	QUALITY OF STOOL	ANY OTHER COMMENTS
WEEK 1				
WEEK 2				
WEEK 3				
WEEK 4				
WEEK 5				
WEEK 6				
WEEK 7				
WEEK 8				