



DIET TRIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOGS

The only way to diagnose a food allergy is by conducting a diet trial (also known as food trial or elimination diet) and this in itself should be seen as a diagnostic test. The results of your dog's NEXTLAB food test will guide the selection of the appropriate ingredients to be used in the diet trial.

NEXTLAB FOOD TEST RESULTS			
PROTEINS	Candidate for Dietary Trial	Class Score	
		IgE	IgG
Mammalian			
Beef		4	4
Cow's milk		2	3
Lamb	✓	0	0
Pork		3	1
Rabbit		4	1
Venison		1	1
Avian			
Chicken	✓	0	0
Duck	✓	0	0
Turkey	✓	0	0
Whole egg	✓	0	0

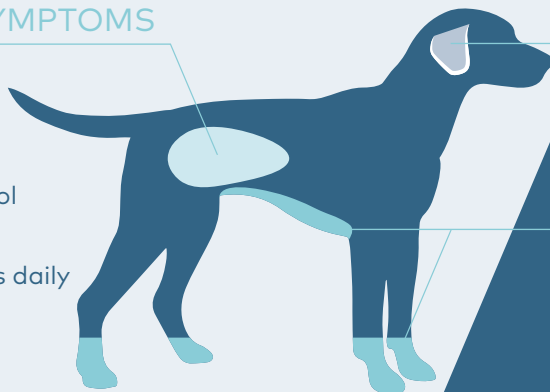
Abbreviated example results for demonstration purposes.

WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?

A food allergy involves an immune reaction to one or more specific ingredients in the diet. The food in question is incorrectly viewed by the animal's immune system as a threat, resulting in the production of antibodies (part of the body's natural defence) against it. This can cause digestive symptoms, ear symptoms or skin symptoms, which may occur on their own or in combination, as shown below.

DIGESTIVE SYMPTOMS

- Diarrhoea
- Loose stools
- Excess gas
- Jelly on / with stool
- Vomiting
- More than 3 stools daily



EAR SYMPTOMS

Appearance: Smelly, irritated and inflamed, scabs
Behaviour: Scratching, rubbing

SKIN SYMPTOMS

Appearance: Smelly, irritated and inflamed, areas of hair loss, dandruff / scabs, greasy, skin colour change
Behaviour: Scratching, rubbing, persistent licking, chewing or nibbling

WHY HAS MY DOG BEEN PUT ON A DIET TRIAL?

It is impossible to tell just from their symptoms whether an itchy dog has a food allergy, an allergy to something in their environment, or both, because the symptoms can look exactly the same. Likewise, there are many other possible reasons for dogs to have digestive symptoms.

As part of the process to reach a diagnosis for the symptoms your dog is displaying, it is important to either rule-in or rule-out a food allergy. For dogs with skin symptoms this is normally done after infections (bacterial, yeast and fungal) and ectoparasites (fleas, mites and lice) have already been ruled-out and / or treated for. Those with digestive signs may have already had blood tests and / or a sample of their stool sent for analysis to rule out other causes.

WHY CAN'T I JUST USE MEDICATION?

For some dogs with food allergies, removing the problem foods from their diet will mean that their symptoms will completely resolve, preventing the need for life-long medication. Other dogs with skin and ear 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, because allergy is a life-long condition and the dietary changes may reduce the amount of medication they need. Food allergies are common, especially in dogs with skin or ear problems, so while it's important to recognise many dogs will not improve during the diet trial, the potential benefit for those that do makes it an essential part of the diagnostic work-up and well worth doing.

WHAT DOES A DIET TRIAL ENTAIL?

Conducting a diet trial means that for up to 8 weeks you will feed your dog a very strict diet consisting of only water, and:

- **The agreed food(s)** – this will either be a home-prepared or a commercial diet.
- **Necessary medications** – this may include treatment for the skin, ear or digestive symptoms. Follow your vet’s advice on appropriate use during the diet trial. If any medications contain flavourings, alternative options may be recommended.

If your dog’s symptoms improve, the original diet is given again to see if they 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 ingredient(s) in the diet are causing the reaction, so they can be permanently removed. In a small number of dogs, where there is no response to the initial diet trial, your vet may recommend a second diet trial using a completely different food.

HOW DO WE SELECT AN APPROPRIATE FOOD?

STEP 1: With your vet’s support, identify ingredients that your dog has never eaten before; you can help find these by:

- 1 Using your NEXTLAB food test results – only consider negative scoring foods, where possible.
- 2 Completing a full dietary history – list all foods (commercial or otherwise) known to have been eaten by your dog.
- 3 Avoiding similar foods to those previously eaten - e.g., if beef has been fed, also avoid lamb, cow’s milk and venison, as they could also trigger a reaction (your vet can help provide further guidance based on your dog’s history).

STEP 2: Using the information gathered in step 1, choose the right type of diet to suit you and your dog from the choices below.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DIET

HOME-PREPARED DIET	COMMERCIAL DIETS	
	HYDROLYSED	SINGLE / NOVEL PROTEIN
<p>This involves selecting one protein source and one carbohydrate. You will need to either regularly prepare this diet freshly for your dog or batch cook and freeze.</p> <p>BENEFITS: Very palatable, can be tailored to your dog’s preferences, very limited number of ingredients and complete control of these, unusual ingredients can be used.</p> <p>DRAWBACKS: Substantial time commitment, can be expensive (depending on size of dog / ingredients), needs nutritionally balancing if feeding long-term or for growing dogs (the 8-week trial period is fine for most dogs but your vet will advise), a reaction to the food is still possible.</p>	<p>In a hydrolysed diet, the proteins have been broken down to a small enough size that they are unlikely to stimulate the dog’s immune system.</p> <p>BENEFITS: Originally designed for diet trials, but are also suitable for long term use, minimal chance of causing a reaction, useful if dietary history unknown / eaten wide variety of foods, most are suitable for growing dogs.</p> <p>DRAWBACKS: Expensive, variable palatability, a reaction to the food is still possible.</p>	<p>These diets contain limited and / or unusual protein sources.</p> <p>BENEFITS: Palatable, can be less costly than hydrolysed diets, usually suitable for long-term feeding of adult dogs, some contain other ingredients that can benefit the skin / gut.</p> <p>DRAWBACKS: Often contain many ingredients overall, so increase the chance of causing a reaction. As a result, these diets are often used for long-term management rather than for the food trial. May be unsuitable for growing dogs.</p>

Please note, the term **hypoallergenic** is used for many different sorts of commercial diets; some of these may be hydrolysed or a single / novel protein but many are unsuitable for a diet trial. Your vet will be able to provide guidance.

IMPORTANT: A successful diet trial requires your full commitment. Be upfront and realistic when discussing options with your vet, both at the beginning and throughout, so that it can be adapted or modified to suit you and your dog.

STARTING THE DIET TRIAL

To minimise the chance of a digestive upset, gradually introduce the new diet over a period of 5 - 7 days. Slowly give more of the new diet and less of the old until it is completely replaced. If your dog has any digestive upset (vomiting / diarrhoea), refuses to eat the new diet, 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.

Like any diagnostic test, a diet trial must be run properly in order to generate meaningful results, so it is very important to follow your vet's instructions completely. Below are some tips on making your dog's diet trial a success.



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL DIET TRIAL

TREATS

- For treats during the diet trial there are a few ideas below; or you can use small amounts of the new agreed food as it is.
- If using a commercial diet, kibble can be soaked in water and baked to make your own treats.
- If using a home-prepared diet, use small amounts of the fresh, pre-agreed ingredients to make treats.
- Some commercial treats may be suitable if they contain just a single ingredient (e.g., 100% duck); check with your vet before you buy to make sure.

HIDDEN INGREDIENTS

- Avoid flavoured items such as supplements, toothpastes, toys and chews. Ask your vet for alternatives.
- Avoid using food to give medication during the diet trial, unless it has been agreed with your vet.
- Always check the additional ingredients listed on the packaging of any food used (commercial or home-prepared) to ensure they do not contain traces of the ingredients you are trying to avoid.

ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE

- If possible, feed any other pets in the household the same diet. If not, feed them separately and remove their feeding bowls immediately afterwards.
- Avoid cross-contamination by thoroughly washing bowls, chopping boards, pans, utensils and your hands before preparing food. Use ceramic, stainless steel, or glass bowls, especially if skin symptoms are mainly around the face.
- Don't let your pet scavenge on walks or at family meal times and ensure they do not have access to bins or food cupboards. Consider using a basket muzzle if they are prone to scavenging. Ask your vet how to introduce your dog to a muzzle so that it is a positive experience.

GET EVERYONE INVOLVED

- Ensure everyone in the house, or involved in looking after your dog, fully understands the importance of following the rules, in order to make the results count.
- Use the diary on page 4 to record everything consumed by your dog during the trial, as well as any symptoms or changes in condition, to help you and your vet monitor their progress.



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

AMOUNT OF ITCHING

Using the scale* shown below, grade the amount of itching between 0-10 and record in the table below.

0	NORMAL DOG	Itching is not a problem; normal for dogs
2	VERY MILD	Occasional itch, more frequent than before skin problem started
4	MILD	More frequent itching, but not when sleeping, eating, playing, exercising or when otherwise distracted
6	MODERATE	Regular, may itch overnight but not while eating, playing, exercising or when otherwise distracted
8	SEVERE	Prolonged episodes of itching. Occurring at night and possibly while eating, playing, exercising or when otherwise distracted
10	EXTREME	Constant itching whatever is happening; needs to be physically restrained to stop

BOWEL MOVEMENTS AND STOOL QUALITY

Estimate average number of stools per day for that week.

Using the scale** shown below, grade the quality of stool between 1-7 (with 2 being normal) and record in the table below.

1	Dry and pellet-like
2	Firm but not hard, segmented. No residue when picked up
3	Formed but moist log shape, no segmentation. Some residue when picked up
4	Very moist log shape, loses form. Leaves residue when picked up
5	Very moist piles, loses form. Leaves residue when picked up
6	Wet, unshaped piles / spots. Leaves residue when picked up
7	Watery puddles, no texture

Dog's name:

Dog's weight at start of trial:

Selected diet:

Amount to be fed daily:

	AMOUNT OF ITCHING (0-10)	BOWEL MOVEMENTS (average number / day)	QUALITY OF STOOL (1-7)	ANY OTHER COMMENTS (e.g., changes in your dog's symptoms, behaviour, medication, food or treat intake)
WEEK 1				
WEEK 2				
WEEK 3				
WEEK 4				
WEEK 5				
WEEK 6				
WEEK 7				
WEEK 8				

*Scale adapted using figure from - Hill, P. B., Lau, P. and Rybnicek, J. (2007), Development of an owner-assessed scale to measure the severity of pruritus in dogs. Veterinary Dermatology, 18: 301-308.
 **Scale adapted from www.purinainstitute.com