

Food Allergies in Pets (A guide for pet parents)



What Are Food Allergies?

Just like people, pets can react to certain foods. About **10–15% of pet allergies** are food-related.

Most are caused by **pollens, dust, mold, or fleas**, but food allergies look very similar.

Signs of allergies include:

- Itching, scratching, chewing, licking
- Hair loss or skin infections
- Red, irritated skin
- Frequent ear infections

Many pets have **both food and seasonal allergies**.

When to Suspect a Food Allergy

- Puppies under **7 months** who itch and chew early
- Dogs over **5 years old** who develop new itching
- Pets itchy **all year long** (not just in spring/summer)
- Frequent ear or skin infections
- GI issues: vomiting, diarrhea, frequent stools

Common itchy spots:

Ears • Feet • Face • Armpits • Groin

Most Common Food Allergens Dogs

- Chicken (also turkey, duck)
- Beef (also bison)
- Lamb
- Dairy (whey, casein)
- Pork
- Wheat, corn, soy, brown rice

👉 These account for **90% of food allergies** in dogs.

Cats

- Beef, fish, dairy = **80% of cases**
- Also: chicken, rabbit, lamb, pork, eggs

How We Diagnose Food Allergies

There are **no reliable blood or skin tests**. The only way is a **food trial**:

- Feed a special diet for **8–10 weeks**
- No other foods, treats, flavored chews, or flavored meds
- All family members must commit

Food Trial Options

Prescription Diets

- Hill's Derm Complete (food + seasonal allergies)
- Hill's z/d (hydrolyzed chicken or soy)
- Hill's d/d (novel proteins – venison, duck, potato)
- Royal Canin Ultamino or Selected Protein
- Purina EL (Elemental)
- Purina Pro Plan Sensitive Skin & Stomach (salmon-based, no chicken)

*(Available through our website: www.CarolinaValuePetCare.com)

Other Diet Choices

- **Hydrolyzed diets** – proteins broken down so the body doesn't react
- **Novel protein diets** – proteins your pet hasn't eaten (rabbit, venison, salmon, trout, catfish, whitefish)
- **Limited Ingredient Diets (LID)** – quality brands like Acana, Zignature, Natural Balance, Halo, Wellness

Home-Cooked Diets

(for dedicated owners)

Dogs

- Carbohydrate: sweet potato, peas, pinto beans
- Protein: rabbit, venison, kangaroo, ostrich, fish (if new to your pet)

⚠ Long-term diets must be **balanced with vitamins & minerals**.

Resources: www.ACVN.org, balanceit.com, petdiets.com

Cats

- More challenging due to pickiness
- Options: rabbit, venison, duck, lamb, ostrich
- Often easier to use a commercial diet

Rules for Food Trials

- ✗ No flavored meds or treats
- ✗ No table scraps or rawhides
- ✗ No sharing food bowls or kitty litter snacks
- ✓ Use topical or injectable preventives
- ✓ Use unflavored pet toothpaste (not poultry)
- ✓ Everyone in the home must stick to the plan

Safe Treats During a Trial

- Carrots, green beans, peas
- Broccoli, zucchini, cucumbers
- Cherry tomatoes
- Baked sweet potato slices (plain, no butter)

Avoid:

- Chicken (scraps, nuggets, Greenies)
- Beef (meat scraps, rawhide)
- Dairy (cheese, yogurt, ice cream)
- Wheat (bread, pizza crust, crackers, Milk-Bones)
- Pork (bacon, pig ears, peanut butter)

What to Expect

- Some pets improve quickly, others need several weeks
- 10–15% may not respond to diet changes alone
- Many pets have **both food + seasonal allergies** → may still itch at certain times
- If improved, you can:
 - Stay on the successful diet long-term
 - Or reintroduce ingredients **one at a time** (every 2 weeks) to identify the culprit

Bottom line: A food trial is the only reliable way to diagnose food allergies. With patience and the right diet, most pets experience major improvements in itching, skin health, and overall comfort.