



Food Allergy

What is food allergy?

Food allergy is a result of an adverse immunologic reaction to an ingredient or supplement in a pet's diet. Most patients with food allergy have a sensitivity to the protein source (chicken, beef, egg) however sensitivities to carbohydrates, fats or supplements are also possible. Food allergy typically affects animals less than one year of age, however a food allergy can develop at any age.

What are the symptoms of food allergy?

The most common symptoms of food allergy in dogs include redness of skin and itching directed toward the face, paws, armpits and groin. In cats, itching is directed toward the head, ears and neck. Feline patients may also develop ulcers on their lips or skin. Symptoms tend to be non-seasonal as they are being exposed to the food allergen every day when fed. A portion of patients with food allergy will display intestinal symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, flatulence or increased number of bowel movements.

How is food allergy diagnosed?

An elimination diet trial is the gold standard for diagnosing a food allergy. During this trial, your pet's diet is changed to one of the following hypoallergenic diets: 1) novel protein, 2) hydrolyzed protein or 3) home-cooked. It is important to avoid offering any previous diets, treats, supplements (fish oil, probiotic) or flavored oral medications during this time as these can interfere with results.

The hypoallergenic diet is offered for a minimum of 8 weeks. If improvement is seen during the diet trial, then your pet will be challenged with its previous diet. If a recurrence of symptoms is observed, then a food allergy is likely.

How is food allergy managed?

Once a food allergy has been diagnosed, individual ingredient challenges can be performed to identify the exact ingredient(s) your pet is/are sensitive to. This information can then be used to select an over-the-counter diet which does not contain the ingredient(s). Some owners elect NOT to proceed with the individual ingredient challenges and continue to offer the hypoallergenic diet indefinitely. This can be done if the diet is well-balanced, however it may create future problems if your pet's diet needs to be altered as the exact offending ingredient(s) remains unknown.

If you are concerned your pet may have a food allergy, consider contacting the OVS Dermatology service at 918-299-4900 to schedule an appointment.