



Dutch Fork Animal Hospital

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The Pawprint: Online

Figuring out Food Allergies!!

By: Jessica Sylvester, LVT

For many of us, a pet with allergies is a very real and frustrating part of our lives!

We are surrounded by frequent itching, scratching, ear shaking, foot chewing, skin flaking, and the unforgettable smell of skin infection that just keeps coming back for more! Infuriating, right? Fear not! Though it may sound strange, those of us with a truly food allergic pet should consider ourselves more fortunate. Since we control what our pets eat, we also have more control over their allergy.



However, true food allergies or sensitivities are responsible for only about 10 to 15% of all allergies seen in our dogs and cats, falling behind flea bite and atopy (inhalant) allergies.

So for starters, what is an allergy? It is a damaging and over reactive immune response that the body undergoes

when exposed to an antigen that causes hypersensitivity. In this case, our pet's immune system is over reacting to antigens, typically the protein sources within their food.

As a result, even if the symptoms are treated and managed, each new exposure to the antigen triggers a new



over-zealous immune response resulting in a recurrence of symptoms. This explains why our allergy pets can become so miserable so quickly even after just finishing up a round of medication. Unless we can identify and remove the source of the allergy, we will continue to need medical management of the resulting symptoms. It is this recurring cycle that can make allergy management so frustrating and tedious.

The key to managing allergy issues is to identify the allergens causing

the allergic reaction to occur. Fortunately, there are a few methods to discover what is causing our pets to itch.

First, and most effective, is the Food Elimination Trial. For this test, we change our pet's diet to a new food with a "novel" protein source, typically a protein they have never

Employee Spotlight: Susan Etherton, LVT



Susan has had a very exciting life full of different experiences that have brought her to DFAH. She graduated from Eastern Illinois University in 1996 with a B.S. in Zoology. While in Illinois, she began her animal career at a nature center working with children in an educational setting. She then went to Sanibel Island, FL working with injured, orphaned, and sick wildlife.

Next in her adventures, she joined a wildlife refuge that rescued large carnivores before she traveled to Gabon, a small country in central Africa, for the Peace Corps.

Employee Spotlight continued: Susan Etherton, LVT

Since her time in Africa, Susan has worked at a wildlife rehabilitation center in Texas, the San Antonio Zoo, the Mesker Park Zoo in Indiana, a kangaroo and Australian animal center in Georgia, and even worked at our very own Riverbanks Zoo as a keeper.

After a knee injury, she switched gears and began studying small animal medicine. She received her degree in veterinary technology at Penn Foster College in 2016 and is now one of our new Licensed Veterinary Technicians! She joined the DFAH team in September 2014 and is excited to see where her new career takes her! We are thrilled to have Susan as a valued part of our DFAH family!



Food Allergies continued...

been exposed to before. Once the diet is selected, they have to be fed **ONLY** that food for a full 8 to 12 weeks with no additional treats, human foods, or flavored chew toys. If the new protein source is acceptable, we should see a marked improvement of our pet's symptoms over the course of those 8 to 12 weeks.



Once resolution is achieved, assuming the diet change helped, the next step is to reintroduce the original diet and watch for any reoccurrence of symptoms. If the symptoms return, the

diagnosis of a food allergy is confirmed.

Another way to test for allergies is through **dermal injection allergy testing usually performed by a veterinary dermatologist**. This test is very similar to the one performed on human patients and involves having several injections of various known allergens applied to the skin to stimulate an immune response. The reactions are then monitored and recorded, allowing a sort of allergy "vaccine" to be developed for your pet. However, this test is not effective for food specific allergies and is typically only recommended to screen for atopic or contact allergens!

The third testing option, is a **blood serum test that can be used to screen for food or inhalant allergies**. This test works by screening for existing antibodies to specific allergens in the blood that are the result of previous exposure. In order for the blood serum test to be effective, your pet must have been recently exposed to the antigen

that causes reactions. Blood serum testing is not considered the best means of acquiring an accurate diagnosis for food allergies.

Once a food allergy is diagnosed, a plan to help prevent repeat exposure to that allergen will be put into place. Often this will require strict feeding requirements with some "as needed" medical management during "flare ups", if there is accidental exposure.



Every pet is unique and has varying medical and nutritional requirements, meaning each preventative plan must be tailored specifically to your pet's needs!

It is also important to note that some pets with already existing food allergies can develop allergies to the new food over long periods of time and may need a second diet change.

Allergies of any kind can be extremely frustrating and often take a lot of trial and error to find the best treatment and preventative plan for your pet. However, with continuously growing veterinary knowledge, we have an ever improving set of tools to help us make the best of an often unpleasant ailment!



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Keeping In Step!



www.dutchforkanimalhospital.com

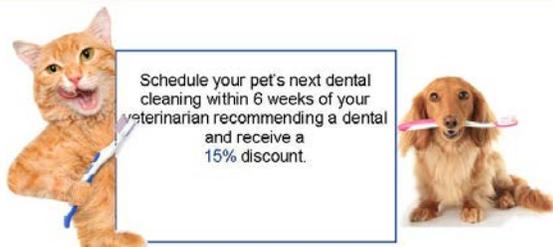
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Upcoming News and Events!!

- **We are changing the way we do our Dental Health Promotions!**
- **Starting now:** After any exam where we recommend a dental cleaning, we will provide a coupon that is good for 15% off your pet's next dental if scheduled within the following 6 weeks after the recommendation is made!
- This allows us to offer Dental Discounts all year long instead of just Bi-annually! Spread the Word!!
- **Open House 2016!!**
- Date to be Determined, but expect food, fun, and friendly faces!
- Involves a guided tour of our facilities, freebie grab bags, unique coupons and promotional goodies, as well as, a chance to hang out with some of your favorite doctors and staff!
- Further details coming soon!!

Take advantage of our dental promotion year round!



Valid _____ thru _____.