

Pet Allergies and Diet

by Robert Silver, DVM, consulting veterinarian for Nature's Variety

Ask any veterinarian (including myself) and they will tell you that they are seeing more cases of dogs and cats with allergies than they ever have at any other time in their careers.

Perhaps you have an allergic pet, or know of someone who does. Allergies, although not life-threatening, can be dog-gone life-altering in terms of your pet's "Quality of Life". In my own small animal practice in Boulder, Colorado, at least 30% of my new patients present with an allergy-related problem.

Although no one has come up with a definitive answer for the cause(s) of allergies, many agree that: Breeding, diet, vaccinations, and toxic environment all play a role. Some studies indicate that antibiotics given to young children or puppies and kittens increase their risk of developing allergies later in life. When beneficial *Lactobacillus acidophilus* cultures are given after the antibiotics, these youngsters' risk of developing allergies is statistically quite less.

Diets high in Omega 6 fatty acids are also known to increase inflammation. Omega 6 fatty acids come primarily from grains. Feeding diets that contain high percentages of grains can also contribute to the development of allergies. Many animals are allergic to grains like wheat and corn, and feeding diets that contain these grains can cause severe itching and chronic ear infections.

Animals can be allergic to many substances, including pollen, dust and mold in the environment as well as a wide variety of foods. Diets that are high in grains create an imbalance in the body's normal pH, making the skin less healthy, which makes it more susceptible to yeast and bacterial infections. These "secondary" infections are commonly associated with allergies in pets.

Many pet foods are made with by-products from the food processing industry that are less digestible and which are not as nutritious as wholesome unprocessed foods. Thus many pet foods do not provide the wide diversity of nutrients that are naturally occurring in the diets of wild dogs (wolves and coyotes) and cats (bobcats, mountain lions, feral domestic cats). The better commercial diets for dogs or cats contain the same wide diversity of nutrients found in "wild" diets.

The "wild" diet of dogs and cats contains no grains, and is higher proportionately in animal meat protein and omega 3 fats. Allergies are very uncommon in wild animals, due in part to their highly nutritious "wild" diet. Feeding domesticated dogs and cats substantial amounts of animal protein improves their health by following the diets that they eat naturally in the wild.

Changing your pets' diet regularly to different sources of protein and carbohydrates is called "Rotation". Diet rotation helps to mimic the wild diet by providing a wide diversity of nutrients that changes over time, in the same way that the "wild" diet changes with the nomadic wanderings of wild dogs and cats, as well as with climate and seasonal changes.

Feeding a pet food that is minimally processed, higher in omega 3 fatty acids and animal protein, and lower in grains and omega 6 fatty acids can help improve the health of the pet with allergies. Many people note improvement in their pets' hair, coats and itching problems when they switched their pets' diets from their same old kibble to a home made or commercial raw diet. These diets generally contain no grains and consist of raw meat and vegetables with calcium added in the form of ground-up bone.

Allergies can be a life long problem in our pets. Fortunately, feeding a wholesome diet, raw, if possible and rotating the food every few months can help these suffering pets. In addition to a healthy diet, add in omega 3 fatty acids and acidophilus cultures can also help.