

## **How to complete a diet trial for patients with allergies or food intolerances**

A vet will recommend a diet trial for animals with allergy symptoms that may be related to ingredients present in their diet.

A prescription diet will be prescribed for your pet - usually phrased as 'hydrolysed'. These diets are to be fed exclusively for 8-12 weeks with no additional snacks or treats at all, unless they are also deemed hypoallergenic.

The term 'hydrolysed' refers to the contents of the diet being broken down into the smallest nutrients before it is eaten. This prevents the body's immune system from recognising or interacting with these nutrients because they are too small.

This stops the allergic reaction cascade that results in vomiting and diarrhoea, inflamed and itchy skin, poor coat condition, weight changes, inappetence and food avoidance.

Unfortunately, pet food has no laws associated with it and is not monitored like human food production. The term 'hypoallergenic' can be advertised on pet food packaging despite its ingredients not being hydrolysed at all. Trusted prescription diets are produced by well known pet food manufacturers including Hills and Royal Canin.

You may need to transition your pet onto a hydrolysed diet over the course of one week as per pet food guidelines, to avoid further gastrointestinal upset. However, most animals take to the new diet well as it is considered to be fairly palatable.

After the trial has been completed and allergy symptoms resolved, there are two options. The first would be to continue feeding the hydrolysed diet lifelong or a novel protein diet, which is likely to be very low down on the canine allergen list. The second would be to begin to introduce individual ingredients into your pet's diet, for example chicken, and record if any symptoms recur. If allergic symptoms returned, we could safely assume that the ingredient introduced is one that your pet is allergic or intolerant to and we would know to keep this ingredient excluded from future diet choices.