

Food Sensitivities & Limited Ingredient Diets

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Food sensitivities (also called food intolerances) are thought to be the most common type of adverse food reaction (AFR) in dogs and cats, but their actual prevalence is unknown.¹ In contrast to food sensitivities, true food allergies are actually relatively uncommon. At this time it is estimated that food allergies are responsible for only ~1% of all skin diseases in dogs and cats.² There are no clear sex or breed predilections for food sensitivities. They can be diagnosed at any age, but young animals and seniors are probably the most commonly affected.

It is important to understand that unlike true food allergies, which result from an abnormal immune response to an ingested dietary protein—also known as a food antigen, food sensitivities do not involve the immune system. While only dietary proteins can cause food allergies, food sensitivities can result from intolerance of specific foods, food groups, nutrient levels within food, or potentially irritating, toxic, or infectious components in food. In addition, previous exposure to a dietary protein is always necessary to develop a food allergy; however, previous exposure to an offending food or food component is not necessary for food sensitivities.

Why Do Food Sensitivities Occur?	
Mal-Digestion	Improper digestion of nutrients in food
Mal-Absorption	Improper absorption of nutrients after digestion
Mal-Assimilation	Improper digestion and absorption
Irritation	Direct irritation of the digestive tract by a food/food component
Toxicity	Adverse reactions to potentially toxic food components
Infection	Infection as a result of food-borne bacteria or other microorganisms



Why Might My Pet Have An Upset Stomach?

Food Scavenging	Getting into the garbage or scavenging/hunting outside
Lactose Intolerance	Adult dogs and cats lose the ability to digest lactose (milk sugar)
High Fat Foods	Especially when given to animals who are not used to eating them
Rapid Diet Transitions	Overfeeding and/or rapid changes in fat, fiber, & moisture levels

Although food sensitivities and food allergies have very different causes, the outward clinical signs or symptoms that are seen in our pets can be quite similar. As with food allergies, digestive problems and skin & coat issues are often associated with food sensitivities in dogs and cats. Common clinical signs noticed include diarrhea, flatulence, vomiting, and skin/coat issues such as dryness, itchiness, and infections. There are no universally accepted methods for diagnosis of food sensitivity or allergy besides an elimination diet trial with challenge test.² An elimination diet trial is where a new diet is carefully selected to try to eliminate any food(s) and/or food component(s) thought to be responsible for the AFR.

After clinical signs resolve during the elimination diet trial, diagnosis of what food(s)/food component(s) are causing the AFR requires a challenge test with the offending food(s) in order to identify the specific source(s) of the AFR. Obviously, it can be daunting to offer a food that could potentially cause a relapse, and identification of offending food components can be nearly impossible in some cases. Sometimes, even when challenge tests are performed and one or more offending foods/food components are identified, it can still be difficult to completely differentiate between a food sensitivity and food allergy.

Working with your veterinarian to select an appropriate diet for your pet can be crucial to managing food sensitive pets and to rule out other potential causes for skin, coat, and/or digestive problems. As stated, an elimination diet should be carefully chosen to help identify what foods or food components need to be avoided. Important considerations when choosing an elimination diet should always include:

- **Limited Ingredient Diets:** – To provide complete and balanced nutrition from the fewest possible key ingredients
– To help narrow down which foods/food components are problematic and which are accepted and well-tolerated
- **Novel Ingredients:** To intentionally avoid foods/food components either previously fed or thought to be problematic
- **Treats:** Discuss any treats, supplements, and medications with your veterinarian because they might also have the potential to cause food sensitivities
- **Expert Formulation:** To focus on the importance of digestive and skin & coat health

Limited Ingredient Diets (LIDs) should be composed of just a few pure & simple ingredients, ideally with a single animal protein and single carbohydrate source.³ In most cases, LIDs are the most appropriate choice both for an elimination diet trial and for long-term nutritional management of AFR's including food sensitivities.

In addition to using LIDs to aid in the nutritional management of food sensitivities, certain nutrients such as B-vitamins and prebiotic fibers can be helpful. Essential B-vitamins provided in complete and balanced pet foods are important for maintaining the integrity of the skin.⁴ For pets with digestive problems related to food sensitivities, feeding foods with prebiotic fibers can help support a healthy digestive tract.⁵ Prebiotic fibers, such as chicory root and pea fiber, contain inulin which is an energy source for beneficial or "good" intestinal bacteria. The benefit of encouraging the growth of these "good" bacteria is that they produce short-chain fatty acids, which in turn help to maintain a healthy and well-functioning large intestine by serving as an energy source for large intestinal cells called colonocytes.⁶

If you suspect that your pet is experiencing a food sensitivity please speak with your veterinarian. It you would like more information about the California Natural and California Natural Grain Free lines of natural limited ingredient diets from Natura Pet, please speak with your veterinarian, your local independent retailer, and/or a Natura Pet Product Adviser at 1-800-532-7261 or custserv@naturapet.com. For detailed product information please visit our website at www.naturapet.com and for ingredient sourcing information at your fingertips visit us at www.seebeyondthebag.com.

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