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## **Food Allergies - Part II: Identifying the Culprit**

(If you missed the first part of this article, you can get it [here](#).)

When you have done the initial preparations and are ready with your logbook, it is time to proceed with the research project.

Before you proceed any further, you must make sure that the dog is off all medication. You cannot test allergy responses if you have the dog on any kind of medication that will obscure your observations by slurring the symptoms.

Your goal is to identify the food source that causes your dog's allergy problem. You do that through a systematic trial-and-error procedure, by changing the input and observing the output. The input is the diet you feed. The output is the allergy reactions you observe.

### **Conducting your research**

You should be aware that you generally get a very quick response from the dog's immune system when you *add* the allergy trigger through a meal, whereas its effect will take much longer to fade away when you stop feeding it. You will generally see the effect in 1-3 hours after a meal and it might peak 4-12 hours after and then remain fairly high for a day or two until it slowly goes down again over another couple of days. So, you want to pay attention when you *add* a culprit. You have much lesser chances of observing the effect of *removing* it....

The best thing you can now do for your dog is to relieve it from its symptoms by taking all possible allergens away from the food. That means: give your dog a fast! No food - until you have all symptoms down at a level where they are acceptable.... It might take 2-3 days to achieve this - but it will save you months' of hassle and pain for the dog. So, please control your emotions on this.

By the way - if you see no change in the dog's allergy symptoms at all after 3 days with no food, but only water, you can eliminate the possibility of the allergy being food related. It is not. You have to look into the dog's environment now, and you can continue feeding it the same diet as before.

When you get your symptoms down at a low level - and you have them stable there, you feed a meal of group 1. You observe the effect before and after, as discussed.

If you get an increase of certain symptoms, you know you have your culprit in this group.... If you don't, you know it is safe to feed food from this group.

To be sure, you should feed this group for about a week, making you that you have indeed used all the ingredients on the list for this group. You observe and add to your log everything you observe.

After 7-10 days, you shift the diet completely to group 2. You repeat the entire procedure.

Finally, you shift to group 3 and stay on that for 7-10 days also, just as for the other two groups.

### **Confirming your observations**

You have spent about a month on this now, and you have some pretty good ideas as to what could be tricky and what not.

In case you have no clues at all, you must start over, this time with a different grouping of your food sources. You obviously have more than one allergen, and you need to identify at least *some* food that is free of allergens.

Then it is time to confirm your observation and eliminate the possible influence of other factors, like environmental ones and seasonal ones.

You therefore repeat the entire process - but, this time, you may shorten the duration of each period down to 4-5 days instead of the previous 7-10 days, if you have seen that this is enough to observe the changes you are looking for.

### **Narrowing in the target**

When you have one food group identified that is "clean" of allergens, you use this group as you reference. You might simply continue feeding exclusively food from this group, but you might also try to further identify the true culprit, either right away or later. If the ordeal has been hard on the dog, you might want to give it some relief first.

You now divide the food groups that contain allergens. I suggest you use a number of subgroups that is close to the square root of the items. With 25 items, you make 5 groups with 5 items in each. With 45 items, you make six groups, each with 6 or 7 items, as you can fit them. Again, each group should preferably consist of what you would call a balanced diet.

You now take one group and introduce it for a period that you have experienced will be adequate. If you see the results in 1-2 days, there is no reason to go beyond that. Bring the dog back to the "safe" diet for a week. Then introduce only one item from that "bad group" and watch the result. Give the dog a full week on the "safe diet". Then introduce the next candidate from the "bad" group. Continue this until you have identified all the allergens in that group.

Then you move on with the next group that possibly could contain allergens and you repeat the procedure. If a group, when used "complete" shows no allergy symptoms, you make it a candidate for becoming "safe" - but you do not make the nomination until you have repeated your results...

Every time you have exposed the dog to an allergen or possible allergen, you need to make sure you have its body all cleaned out from it before you introduce the next test. That's why you need about a week on a diet of exclusively "safe" contents in-between each test - otherwise you might have "cross-over effects" - and your results get confusing.

### **Aftermath**

Yes - this is tedious - it may easily take many months. That's why it is so extremely important that you keep track of your observations. With no logbook, you are doomed to screw it up...

You might find out, as you go, that you can simplify your procedure, by cutting away certain observations that don't make much difference, and/or by reducing the time you need to be sure you can indeed observe the effect of a change. The main thing is that you "catch" the changes when they are there, and get them into the logbook. You do not need to record all changes - you only need to record enough to be sure whether or not the diet you currently feed contains your suspected allergen or not. The systematic procedure will reveal that allergen eventually. But be certain that you do not get sloppy with the observations so you don't notice a change in the symptoms that would carry information about the allergen!

And, then - of course - there is no such thing as ever vaccinating this dog again. Unless you want more allergies to fight... The vaccine manufacturers themselves warn against using vaccines on dogs with compromised immune systems - and allergies of any and all kinds fall in the category of "compromised immune system". Once you are in that category, additional vaccination *will* cause more damage and also damage to the neurological system - which very well can cost your dog its life....

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