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Food Allergies - Part I: Preparing the Investigation

(This article is also available as a simple [text file version](#))

Food allergies are unfortunately quite common for dogs. Few dog owners are aware, though, that a lot of those allergies are caused by vaccination and kibble feeding!

Allergies are really an over-reaction from the immune system's side. The immune system goes into alert upon a very tiny exposure to a certain protein in the food, as if it were a poisonous discharge from a pathogen. Both vaccines and kibble contain numerous dangerous substances, vaccines far more so than the preserved food, but a constant exposure day in and day out can often break down an otherwise healthy immune system also. The exact mechanisms behind this are not fully understood, and the treatment suggested by many vets often include use of anti-histamine products which really do nothing by obscure the symptoms without doing anything to deal with the reason - which is a "hysterical" reaction from the immune system's side. These kinds of medication do give the dog some relief, though - which can be important if there are severe secondary damages, such as broken and infected skin.

First step - simplifying the problem

The very first thing to do it to eliminate the most common allergens from the dog's diet. Those particularly include:

- Any kind of preserved or cooked food that does not contain a disclaimer on the label that is contains NOTHING but the ingredients on the label - and those ingredients include NO CHEMICALS whatsoever.
- Any kind of cookies and treats that do not get moldy or rot in a matter of 2 days when left at room temperature with access of air.
- All kinds of processed products, like cream cheese, sausages, hamburger meat, canned food, peanut butter, melted fat, beef jerky, rawhide products, pigs ears, and any kind of smoked products.
- All kinds of bakery products, including all treats made of grain products.
- Any kind of nutritional supplement you get in a ready-to-use mix, including vitamin tablets.
- Any kind of flea or worm medication.

Sometimes, flaxseed oil and alfalfa, although prime supplements, can cause allergies in dogs that have been damaged by too much vaccination.

First step is to make sure that your dogs gets nothing of the above to eat - ever. You must take an oath from everybody in the household, and you can have no tolerance for exceptions, no matter how much you will have to hurt the feelings of such people....

If the symptoms are dramatically reduced after a week, you are most likely done. If not, you continue with step 2:

Step 2: Making sure that your problem is a food allergy...

Let me clear this point first: if you are mistaken in your assumption that the dog's allergy is indeed a food allergy, you are in for causing your dog a lot of trauma and unpleasant experiences by following any kind of systematic procedure in order to eliminate a food allergen.... Please keep this in mind before you scream when you find out what step 2 will be:

Give the dog a 3-day fast!

If you see no change after 3 days of no food, only water, then you are NOT dealing with a food allergy at all, and you should stop messing around with this problem as a food allergy problem. Save both yourself and your dog for a lot of hassle and unpleasant experiences by addressing the problem from a different angle.

However, if the dog's allergy symptoms reduce during the fast, you can be quite certain that you are indeed dealing with a food allergy, and you then prepare your research.

And, just for the record: your dog is carnivore that easily can handle a couple of days with no food, not matter what it wants you to believe!

Measuring the immeasurable...

You need a plan for the experiment. Yes - this is like a scientific study! You must change parameters in your dog's food and observe the results. Doing this in a systematic way will, eventually, reveal the culprit to you, so you can avoid food items that contain that allergen! You are dealing with as many unknowns as you have components in your dog's diet - and trying to solve such a mystery without using some kind of systematic technique is hopeless.

First of all you need to understand what you "measuring". This should be "the dog's reaction" - itchiness, loss of hair, dry skin, other behaviors indicating that the dog is uncomfortable. For the best results, you should make a list of those symptoms, and you should, for each of them, get an understanding of how you are going to mark them. You will mark them in accordance with your observations. One scale could be

0. Not noticeable
1. Barely noticeable - no major deal, but it is there...
2. Noticeable - probably tolerable, but quite annoying and distressing for the dog
3. Obvious and annoying - for both dog and owner
4. Very annoying and very stressful for the dog
5. Causing secondary damage to the skin in spots that are frequently "worked on" by the dog.

You can use the number to the left as abbreviations for your observation - or you can use any other kind of marking system that works for you. If you are a teacher or a parent, you might want to use the school's system for evaluating kids' performance. You are to evaluate each specific *symptom's* "performance".

"Divide and reign"...

Next comes your plan. You now divide all the food you give the dog into three groups. Each group must give the dog a good nutritional balance and represent a reasonable meal plan you possible could continue for life. It is a good idea to try to isolate some possible culprits in just one group instead of spreading them over several groups. For instance, if you suspect an allergy to *beef protein*, you have all beef products in one group. This includes meat, fat, bones, and organs!

If you do not make lists of what each group contains, or if you do not stick with your definition of what kind of ingredients go into which group, you are screwing up your results and making it impossible for yourself to draw any conclusions from your observation.

You need pen and paper for this. You need a logbook where you can add your observation of each of the indicators you are going to watch. You give each one of them a mark, and you do this at least twice as often as you feed the dog! Minimum is before you feed and two hours after you fed. This goes for everything that goes into the dog's stomach, including food the dog stole - and treats!

You might want to add extra data - it won't hurt. Particularly if you notice any kind of pattern in the symptoms.

So, when you get your logbook organized with nice lists of the components in each of the three food groups, and with a clear list of the symptoms you want to observe, you are ready to [continue with part II](#).

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