

## Allergy Testing - What Are Your Options?

### Environmental Allergy (Atopy) Testing

People tend to associate allergies in dogs with food, but in fact, environmental allergies are extremely common. Dogs can be allergic to many things in their environment such as:

- Fleas - even a single bite can create massive reaction, lasting for weeks!
- Dust mites – by far the most common allergen in dogs and cats, with year round occurrence.
- Moulds – common in British Columbia!
- Grasses and Weeds - spring, summer and fall season.
- Trees and pollens – late winter and early spring. Environmental allergies can be very frustrating, because it is very hard to figure out what is triggering the allergy without a test. In addition, most individuals have more than one allergen that they can be reacting to, that can stretch over all four seasons or year round. There are two kinds of environmental allergy tests:

**Intradermal testing (IDT)** involves shaving a wide square of skin on the animal's side or back and performing a series of injections under sedation, where various potential allergens are placed beneath the skin. The pet is then monitored to see which allergens cause a skin reaction and how severe the reaction / welt is.

However, IDT has some drawbacks. First and possibly most important, it can be

uncomfortable for the animal! Owners are often reluctant to put their dog through this test, especially when the pet is already suffering from skin irritation. Dermatologist would still use this test on certain candidates, usually in combination with serum/ blood allergy testing.

### Blood Serum Testing

Allergy blood tests measure a kind of antibody called IgE in the blood. These antibodies are quite rare in people or animals who do not have allergies, but are present in abundance when the person has an allergy. We simply draw a blood sample from your pet and send it to the laboratory. They will test against a number of common regional allergens to see if your pet has IgE antibodies against those allergens.

There are two different ways to test for IgE antibodies. The older way is called Radioallergosorbent Test (RAST). The newer way uses an Enzyme-Linked Immunoglobulin Assay (ELISA) technique. Studies on the ELISA methodology from the lab we recommend (Idexx/Greer) have found this blood test to be 90%



**Allergy Testing - cont.**

accurate and certainly it is much less uncomfortable for our patients! The best time to test your pet is at his/her peak of allergy flare ups, as long as he or she has been off any steroids for at least 2 to 3 weeks prior to testing. Allergens we test for in our region include these trees, weeds, grasses, parasites, and moulds:

Walnut, Alder, Cottonwood, Elm, Olive, White Pine, Scale Mix, Kochia/Firebush, Nettle, Russian Thistle, Sage Mix, Maple, Mulberry, Oak, Pine, Ash, Cedar, Dandelion, Goldenrod, Cocklebur, Dock/Sorrel, English Plantain, Lamb's Quarter, Pigweed, Ragweed, Fleas, Dust Mites, Storage Mites, Bermuda Grass, Meadow Fescue, Johnsongrass, Kentucky Bluegrass/June Grass, Perennial Ryegrass, Quack Grass, Redtop, Timothy, Alternaria, Aspergillus, Cephalosporium, Cladosporium, Curvularia/Drechslera, Mucor, Penicillium, Pullularia, Aureobasidium, Stemphylium.

There are also additional panels that can be run which are specific to insects or yeast. It should be noted that the level of antibodies in your dog's blood can vary depending on time of year and whether your dog is on steroids. We recommend testing when your dog is not on steroids to increase the accuracy of the results.

**Food Allergy Testing**

Food allergies or intolerances are another common cause for recurrent skin problems in animals. Proteins are the most common allergens, but animals can develop allergies to anything they are exposed to in their diet. Some of the most common allergens are:

Chicken, Beef, Corn, Wheat, Dairy, Soy

Food allergies can be frustrating, but we always hope for a food allergy over an environmental allergy. It is much easier to control your pet's diet than it is to control the entire world around your pet! Unfortunately, testing options for food allergies are much more limited.

**Intradermal testing** used to be the most recommended method for testing food allergies. However, very few studies have found Intradermal testing to be reliable for food allergens. Dermatologists no longer recommend it.

**Blood tests for food** have existed for many years, and follow similar methodologies to those for environmental

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allergies. However, dermatologists have never considered blood allergy testing to be reliable, and studies show that there is very little value to the tests. The lab we recommend (Idexx/Greer) no longer even offers blood tests for food allergens.

### Elimination Diet

The most practical and reliable way to identify a food allergen is to put the pet on a strictly controlled diet with limited number of ingredients. The goal is to put the animal on a 6 to 8 week minimum diet trial containing completely novel ingredients that he/she has never eaten before. The best way to implement this diet is through balanced home made diet plans.

Some vets recommend a **veterinary hypoallergenic diet**. Many of these have been specially formulated to have completely novel protein sources, often man-made in a laboratory. However, at Healing Paws, we believe that many of the other ingredients in the food, from the starches to the preservatives, could easily be things that the pet has been exposed to before, and can easily provoke allergic reaction and suppress immunity of your pet. The best elimination diet consists of only two or three ingredients and is prepared at home, so the owner knows 100% for sure that there are no hidden ingredients. Raw diet can be used for this matter, as long as it has approved and supervised by your veterinarian. After 6-8 weeks of limited and strict ingredients in the diet other ingredients can be added one by one at the time. That way, if a break-out occurs, we will know exactly which food item triggered the allergic reaction. In a way, an elimination diet is not so much a test to find out what your pet is allergic to, but a test to figure out what your pet is NOT allergic to and is able to tolerate without adverse (skin or digestive) reactions. But really, isn't that the most important thing to know?

**NutriScan** is a new method for food allergy testing in dogs only. It tests antibodies in the dog's saliva against common food allergens. We are beginning to believe that what we call "food allergies" may actually be a sort of sensitivity or intolerance, such as we see in people with Celiac Disease or Inflammatory Bowel Disease, but which can also express itself as a skin problem, the similar way that gluten intolerance may result in eczema in humans.



Unlike blood tests, which test for IgE antibodies (the antibodies most commonly found in acute allergic reactions), the NutriScan test measures IgA and IgM antibodies, which are secreted by the gastrointestinal system and are associated with sensitivities and intolerances, rather than classical "allergies".

The saliva is collected by placing an absorbent rope in the dog's mouth until the rope is saturated. We then ship the specimen by courier to the NutriScan test laboratory in California. The cost of the test includes a dietary consultation once the results come back so we can institute a diet plan for your pet.

## Allergy Testing - cont.

Nutriscan panel covers the following common food allergens:

Beef, Chicken Eggs, Corn, Barley, Wheat, Millet, Soy, Oatmeal, Cow's Milk, Salmon, Lamb, Rabbit, Venison/Deer, Rice, Chicken, Quinoa, Turkey, Potato, White Fish, Peanut/Peanut Butter, Pork, Sweet Potato

...

Once we gather the information from the above mentioned tests, only then we can propose the plan how to manage, avoid or minimize the effect of specific allergens in your pet's life. This is the essence of allergy management in our patients.

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## UPCOMING EVENTS & PROMOTIONS

**Open House** - 1st week of May, stay tuned for date/time

- Topics: - Home Made Diets
- Supplements
- Allergy Testing

**Allergy Testing** - See the ad on Page 2 for more detail

**New Clients - 50% off** of the consult fees on 1st appointment (one per family)