

What Is a Food Elimination Trial?

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Pets love any treats they can get their paws on, but unfortunately, not all treats agree with our pets! A lot of times, allergies are the root of the problem. They can cause skin issues, gastrointestinal issues and cause general discomfort.

One of the greatest diagnostic tools we have as veterinarians is the food elimination trial. Though it does not sound fun, it can be useful in figuring out the cause of some of these issues. If we do discover an allergy, it could mean a lifetime of relief and comfort for that pet.

So what is a food elimination trial? [We will use a specific diet formulated for our suspected concern](#) (i.e. if we feel the allergy is chicken protein-based, we may opt to try a fish-based diet). This diet needs to be the only thing fed for at least eight weeks. This means no treats unless approved by your veterinarian first. Often, we will use treats that are similar to the food that we are using in the trial (i.e. if we use the fish protein diet then we will look for fish-based treats).

For this to truly be effective, there are some tips and tricks to follow. [Royal Canin](#) has an excellent chart for this (it is directed towards dogs in this case, but the rules stand for cats as well):

Food Elimination Trial Tips



DO:

- Keep an accurate journal of everything your dog eats. This will help you better understand your dog's food allergy.
- Stick to the recommended plan at all times – even one exception can erase your progress.
- Make sure all family members and house guests understand the rules of the trial.
- Wash your hands before and after feeding your dog to reduce the potential for protein contamination.



DON'T:

- Feed anything that your veterinarian has not approved – this includes treats, chews, table scraps and supplements.
- Let your dog eat the food of other pets or get into the garbage.
- Lose hope – a few months of consistency could mean a lifetime of relief and comfort for your dog.
- Make "special" exceptions – just one small treat can have enough allergen to cause a reaction.
- Use your dog's dishes, food scoop, or food container for anything other than their special diet.

ALWAYS check in with your clinic should you have any questions about the trial.

The biggest take away from this chart is don't lose hope! Your pets will beg for treats because that's what they are wired to do, don't feel bad and substitute for those treats that have been approved. Look for those [safe treats](#) that are also very enticing for them (i.e. freeze-dried meat or veggie – approved by a veterinarian first). The more they enjoy the treat, the more enjoyable the trial will be for all parties!

<https://petfocus.ca/dartmouth/food-elimination-trial/>