

Diet Trials



What is a diet trial?

A diet trial is performed to determine if your pet is having an adverse reaction to certain ingredients in the food(s) that are normally eaten. With this trial, your pet's doctor will select a prescription diet consisting of "novel" protein and carbohydrate sources. A novel protein or carbohydrate is one that your pet has not eaten in the past. The selected diet is fed exclusively over the next two to three months to help determine if there was intolerance to the ingredients in the previous diet. This trial period of two to three months may be done several times until the right combination of protein and carbohydrates for your pet are established.

How will my doctor select a diet?

Your Banfield veterinarian will need a thorough medical history of your pet, including a complete list of all the pet foods and treats that you are currently feeding or have previously fed. This includes non-pet food items such as table scraps and chew toys with food flavorings. Based on the dietary information gathered, your Banfield veterinarian will be able to select a diet that contains protein and carbohydrate sources that your pet has not eaten before. This will allow your veterinarian to determine if a previously fed ingredient is a possible problem for your pet.

What are the signs of adverse food reactions?

The signs of adverse food reactions may present in a variety of different ways including:

- Itchy skin and ears
- Redness of the skin
- Ear infections
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

What causes adverse food reactions?

Our pets are fed a variety of processed food proteins and carbohydrates, which are then broken down during digestion. Adverse food reactions may be due to either a chemical intolerance or a unique allergic reaction to a protein ingredient. Allergic reactions only develop with repeated exposure to large proteins over time; thus your veterinarian will recommend a protein source that is either new for your pet or one that has too small of a protein molecule (hydrolyzed protein that has broken down into its component amino acids) to cause an allergic reaction.

Why does my pet need a therapeutic diet?

There are many diets sold commercially that may claim they are "hypoallergenic" or specific "for sensitive skin," but it is important to realize these claims have no official or standard meaning. Commercial pet food manufacturers can substitute other ingredients as long as they meet the guaranteed analysis (the range of nutrients said to be contained in the diet). Therapeutic veterinary diets strive for consistency and the protein and carbohydrate sources remain the same in every batch that is produced. These diets are only available through veterinarians and are formulated to treat food intolerances.

For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

What about over-the-counter diets with similar ingredients to what my doctor recommends?

While some diets you might find in pet stores have similar ingredients (*i.e.*, duck, venison, or fish) to what your veterinarian may recommend, they often have additional ingredients that make them less than ideal for a diet trial. In addition, makers of these diets may not have the same rigorous quality control measures in place that are used by the manufacturers of therapeutic diets. Veterinary therapeutic diets also tend to contain additional fatty acids that help to control itching and keep your pet's skin healthy.

How do I feed my pet this new diet?

The most important thing to do is to follow your veterinarian's instructions thoroughly. Because the diet is a specific protein/carbohydrate blend, only feed the prescribed diet and/or treats. If there is any deviation from the dietary plan it may result in further discomfort for your pet, lost time and a lack of positive results. Human food and treats should absolutely be avoided during a food trial with your pet. When starting a new diet, it is always important to gradually introduce your pet to it. The first day use 1/4 of the new food and 3/4 of the old food for your pet's meals. Then gradually use 1/2 of the new food and 1/2 of the old food, then 3/4 of the new food and 1/4 of the old food until your pet is eating only the new food within five to seven days. This slow transition will increase the likelihood that your pet will accept the new food and lessen the chance for your pet to get an upset stomach or diarrhea due to a food change. Remember to follow your veterinarian's instructions on the quantity of food to feed also. You do not want your pet to gain or lose weight unless directed by your veterinarian.

Can my pet have treats?

Unless recommended by your veterinarian, your pet should only have the prescribed diet at all times. There are several different options that still give appropriate "treats" to your pet:

- Feed pieces of the dry kibble your veterinarian recommended. Most of the time your pet will still think it is a treat, especially if you act like it is.
- Put dry kibble into a Kong® or other unflavored chew toy to provide a snack and entertainment.
- If a canned diet is fed, bake slices of the canned diet (350°F for 10-15 minutes) and turn them into biscuits.
- Clearly communicate to family members and visitors that your pet is on a strict diet and cannot be given any other foods except the diet that has been prescribed.
- Confine pets to another room or crate when visitors are present if you think they will give your pet food that is not part of the approved diet.
- Remember that people food is not an acceptable treat when your pet is going through a food trial.

When should I call my Banfield veterinarian?

Call if your pet's symptoms worsen, if you see vomiting and/or diarrhea or your pet refuses to eat the new food. Always check with your doctor before stopping or changing the diet. Schedule follow-up visits as directed to check your pet's response to the plan of care.

