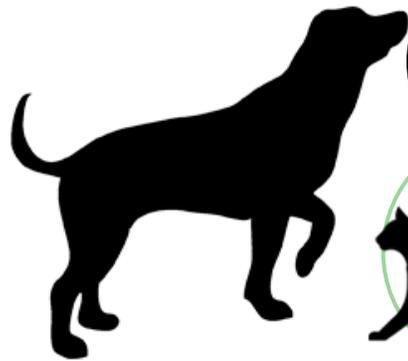
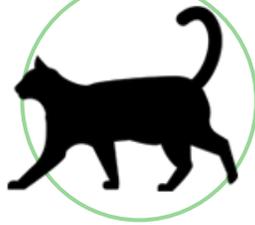


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Itch, Itch, Scratch, Scratch

Dr. Drew Henshaw

Allergies are one of the most common reasons for veterinary visits. Pets can be allergic to things in their environment (dust, pollen, etc.), to insect bites (fleas, wasps and bees), or an ingredient in their food or treats. Each of these types of allergies have specific diagnostic and treatment solutions. In this article we will focus on Food Allergies.

Clinical Signs (symptoms) in Dogs: Allergic reactions to items in food gradually overstimulate a pet's immune system, so it is rare for dogs to exhibit signs before one year of age. Often pets will be itchy (non-seasonally or year-round), have ear infections, oily skin, body odor, and skin infections. Less than half of pets with food sensitivities have gastrointestinal signs, but these may include nausea, diarrhea, gas, and an increased number of bowel movements per day.

Clinical Signs in Cats: Itchy skin is the primary complaint, especially of the ears and face. Hair loss, especially due to over-grooming, is also common. Occasionally cats will develop sores or raised, scabby lesions called plaques on the legs or belly.

Diagnosis: Unfortunately, there is no reliably accurate blood or skin test for food allergies. Secondary problems can mask or compound the underlying disease too: skin

infections (bacteria and yeast), parasites (fleas), and even habitual licking and over-grooming due to anxiety.



The only accurate method of identifying a food allergy is by an elimination diet. In other words, we feed a new food which has no common ingredients with the recent or current diet. "Novel" proteins are often used such as duck, rabbit, ostrich, white fish, and even alligator or kangaroo! Novel vegetables include peas, sweet potato, squash, and beets, for example. Often these foods are expensive, not only because of the ingredients, but because truly hypoallergenic foods must be prepared and separated from other food lines a manufacturer makes so there is no cross-contamination. It is better to think of the food trial as you would a medication- generally a 4-6 week course of exclusively feeding the new food. We also may need to address any infections, temporarily limit the itch with an anti-inflammatory, and prevent self-injury from excessive licking or chewing by prescribing anti-anxiety medi-

cations or using a hood or cone.

Of course, you can always cook for your pet. We can recommend several specific websites run by board-certified veterinary nutritionists with specific recipes and vitamin/mineral supplements.

We expect to see dramatic improvement within 4-6 weeks after exclusively feeding the new diet and after clearing up any existing infections. Once the signs are controlled, we can consider re-introducing specific food items gradually to try to identify which ingredient in the old food we need to avoid going forward. Patience is the key to treating this frustrating condition!



What is a Heartworm Test?

Dr. K.C. VanFleet

Our Oakwood Veterinarians recommend and often require yearly heartworm testing for all of our canines. However, this test does not only check for the presence of heartworms but also three other very serious infectious tick borne diseases that we commonly see. We refer to this test as a "heartworm test" to make it shortened. Below we will discuss each of the four diseases for which this test screens.

Heartworm Disease

Heartworm disease is an extremely serious disease which can often become fatal if not treated early. Heartworms survive in many wild canid species such as coyotes and foxes. Female mosquitoes who feed on the blood from these mammals are then able to transmit larvae stages to our dogs and infect their blood stream. These worms are very slow-growing and go through many different life stages. It can take anywhere from 3-7 months from the time of infection to see clinical signs. Eventually the adult worms will live in the vessels in and around the dog's heart and cause massive damage and even death.

A heartworm test should be performed starting at 7 months of age and then yearly following the initial test. Testing for this disease is done by drawing a small amount of blood from your pet. This blood is then used to run a 4Dx Snap Test (Idexx™) that takes about 10 minutes for results. This test detects a hormone that is produced by the female heartworm's uterus. If this test is

DID YOU KNOW?
Heartworm Prevention costs between \$8-12/month. Heartworm treatment can cost \$1000+. You can buy 7+ years of prevention for the cost of one treatment.

positive, it confirms the presence of heartworms in your dog. Multiple other tests

may be used to assign an appropriate stage of disease for your dog prior to treatment. There are very well-researched protocols for treatments of the disease based on your dog's stage. This can be discussed further with any of the doctors at Oakwood Veterinary Hospital. The best prevention strategy for development of this disease is year-round heartworm prevention such as Heartgard™.

Lyme Disease

The 4Dx also tests for Lyme disease antibodies. Lyme disease is caused by bacteria (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) that is carried by some ticks. Not all ticks carry Lyme disease however, some of the ticks here in northern Michigan have been documented to carry this bacteria. Lyme disease is a very insidious disease and can show many clinical signs. The most common clinical signs we see in dogs with active Lyme disease infection are shift-

ing leg lameness and fever of unknown origin. The veterinarians at Oakwood see more positive Lyme tests than clinical Lyme disease. Our experience here at Oakwood echoes most veterinarians around the country as well. A positive Lyme test does not necessarily mean that your dog has Lyme Disease. It tests for the presence of your dog's antibodies to the Lyme bacteria rather than the bacteria itself. Antibodies are the body's way of fighting off infection and therefore, if the test is positive, this means that your dog has been exposed to Lyme disease in the past.

If your dog's test comes back positive for the first time, we will recommend another test known as a "C6." This second test will be able to quantify or count the number of antibodies that are circulating in your dog's blood. If your dog has an active infection, the number of antibodies will be elevated versus



an inactive infection when the antibody numbers will be low. This test will help us decide if your dog requires treatment for Lyme disease or not. Once your dog tests positive on the 4Dx test, they will likely remain positive on that test for up to 5 years.

DID YOU KNOW?
One of the best and easiest ways to prevent these three tick-borne diseases is to use a monthly preventative such as Nexgard™ or Frontline Gold™

Anaplasma sp. & Ehrlichia sp.

Anaplasma and Ehrlichia are both tick-born bacteria that, when transmitted to our canine patients, cause destruction of either the dog's red or white blood cells. These bacteria penetrate and infect the red and white blood cells similar to the way a parasite attaches to its host. Once inside of the dog's blood cells, the immune system cannot attack the bacteria directly, rather they destroy the cell entirely. Clinical signs of Anaplasma and Ehrlichia are rare but are often associated with anemia and low white blood cell counts.

Similar to Lyme disease, if your dog has a positive result, it does not necessarily mean that your dog has the disease, but that they have been exposed to the bacteria at some point. If your dog tests positive, we will recommend sending out a confirmatory test in which a clinical pathologist examines your dog's blood cells and looks for the parasites within the cells. Treatment for these diseases would only be initiated if a pathologist found evidence of the bacteria or your dog showed anemia or a decrease in their white blood cell count.



The Scoop on Poop

Paula Hock, LVT

You get your reminder call for Bella's appointment tomorrow with an added message to bring a "stool sample" with you. There can be a lot of questions as far as stool samples go. They give us valuable information on where your furry loved one has been and what they have been eating.

"How much poop do I need to bring in?" A stool sample can be run on as little as 5 grams, which is the same as a teaspoon, but feel free to bring a little extra.

"What if I'm seeing worms in my pet's feces?" Any time a client calls saying that they are seeing actual worms in their pet's stool it is a great idea to bring them in for closer examination. I say the fresher the better, since dried up worms are much harder to identify.

"Where does my pet's stool sample go?" If your pet is coming in specifically for

diarrhea or intestinal issues, we may look at the feces in our laboratory. However, we send most samples to an outside lab called IDEXX. At the lab, they can identify particular subspecies a little better as they can look very similar. This makes treatment for infection more precise.

"Can humans contract intestinal parasites from our pet?" There are a few types that can be transmitted to humans. Don't worry, the technician or veterinarian will always educate and remind you of this when we call! Any parasite that can be transmitted to humans can be prevented by good handwashing and not allowing the infected animal to lick a human's face.

"Are there more than one type of intestinal parasite?" Yes! There are over 50 different species of intestinal parasites.

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Below are a few of the most common types we see here!

"My pet has an intestinal parasite. Now what?" You'll always get a call from either a technician or veterinarian letting you know if there's an intestinal parasite present. Most of the time, treatment is rather simple. Some are treated by a liquid medication, others by a packet sprinkled on your pet's food, and some may not be treated. It all depends on the results of the fecal screening!

"How often should I check my dog for intestinal parasites?" We recommend doing a yearly fecal exam if there's no sign of intestinal parasites. Any time there is diarrhea or intestinal issues it is a good idea to check a stool sample. If your dog has an intestinal parasite, we recommend re-checking a stool sample in 90 days to be sure we got rid of the infection.

Common Intestinal Parasites

Roundworms: Transmission of these parasites can include ingestion of feces or infected rodent, from mother's placenta, or from mother's milk. For these reasons, it's found most commonly in puppies and kittens. Roundworms are also transmittable to humans, but that can be prevented by hand washing and not allowing the animal to lick the human's face.

Coccidia: These are found in the soil after an infected dog or cat has passed stool in that area. There are several varieties of coccidia that are difficult to differentiate, and though most need to be treated, there is one that is common in rabbit feces called *Eimeria* that does not need treatment. However, it does tell us more if your pets enjoy eating the rabbit and deer poop in the backyard!

Giardia: Giardia is found in the same manner as coccidia though treated differently and may cause varying degrees of diarrhea. Giardia is one of the parasites that can always be transmitted to humans if precautions aren't taken.

Tapeworms: Most commonly described as "rice" looking pieces on the fur by the rectum or in stool samples. These can infect your animal by either eating a flea or a rodent that is infected, most commonly mice. If a fresh segment is brought to the clinic and put under the microscope one of our technicians can identify whether your pet was infected by a flea or rodent.



Hookworms: These parasites get their name from their hook-like mouthparts. They ingest a large amount of blood from the vessels inside the intestinal wall, and can cause anemia in large infections. Infections occurs by four routes: orally, through the skin, through the mother's placenta before birth, and through the mother's milk. Deworming in puppies and pregnant or nursing females can help reduce the risk of this parasite.

Whipworms: Many wild animals carry this parasite and it only takes your pet walking through it and licking their paw to become infected. The most common symptom of whipworms is bloody stool. In more severe cases it may cause anemia, dehydration, and weight loss.

Animal Disaster Preparedness

Anna Pavlik, LVT

Whether it's a natural disaster or a man-made disaster, do you feel prepared to keep your furry friend safe? May 12th is National Animal Disaster Preparedness Day. In times of emergency, chaos and panic can make it hard to prepare for your pets, which is why it's always good to have a plan in advance! Here are some tips to keep your pets safe in a disaster.

Emergency Stickers. Organizations like PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) make stickers that you can put in the windows of your home to indicate that there are animals inside. These are particularly helpful in cases such as house fires where owners may not be present to alert others that there are pets inside. Firefighters and police officers will be able to go into the situation with knowledge that there are pets inside the home. There are even some window stickers that have a place for you to indicate how many dogs, cats, or other types of pets are inside the residence.

Identification. Always make sure that your animal's collars have identification and contact information. Make sure to include your address and phone number.



Veterinary Records. It's always a good idea to keep an extra copy of your pet's veterinary records both in an emergency kit and in your personal records at home. These records can help with proof of rabies vaccination and help identify your pet if they get separated from you.

Safe Haven. Never leave your pets behind in an emergency. Find several boarding facilities in your area that you trust and have a list of their numbers available. Also, many hotels will waive their "no pet" policy during disasters and emergencies! Always have a plan on where your pet (and you!) can go in these situations. You can also ask

family or friends that live outside of the area if they'd be willing to take in your pets.

Emergency Kit. Emergency kits are the fastest and easiest way to make sure you have all the essentials on hand and readily available. Put your emergency kit by an exit that is easy to grab and make sure everyone in the household knows where it is located. Here are a few ideas of what to include in your emergency kit:

- Veterinary records
- Food, water, and bowls
- Extra leash, crate, or carrier
- Blankets, bedding, or towels
- Medications with instructions
- Extra monthly preventatives
- First aid kit
- Cleaning supplies for accidents

Remember, if it's not safe for you, it's not safe for your pet. In times of disaster, it can be overwhelming to make sure you have everything you need. Plan ahead, your furry friend will thank you!

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Tell Us What You Want!

Is there a certain topic that you want to know more about?

Email us at info@oakwoodvethospital.com and let us know what topics you'd like to see in upcoming newsletters!

Oakwood Needs Your Help!

We always accept and appreciate donations of your old blankets and towels you're no longer using! We use them to keep our patients comfortable and cozy while here in the hospital.



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