



Food Allergies and Intolerances in Dogs: Early Signs You Could Spot

Just like people, dogs can experience adverse reactions to certain ingredients in their food. While food allergies and intolerances aren't overly common, they do occur and can significantly affect a dog's wellbeing if left unaddressed. Knowing the early signs and understanding the difference between an allergy and an intolerance can help you make informed decisions about your dog's diet and health.

Allergy vs Intolerance – What's the Difference?

Though the terms are often used interchangeably, they describe two different types of reactions:

- Food allergies involve the immune system. The body mistakenly identifies a particular ingredient (often a protein source) as a threat and launches a response, which can result in symptoms affecting the skin, digestion, or even respiratory system.
- Food intolerances don't involve the immune system. Instead, they usually result from difficulty digesting certain ingredients, leading to more digestive-focused symptoms like bloating, diarrhoea, or excess wind.

Both can be unpleasant for your dog and frustrating for you as an owner, but spotting the signs early can make all the difference.

Common Signs of Food Allergies or Intolerances

Symptoms can vary from dog to dog, but there are several red flags that may point to an issue with food:

- Persistent itching and scratching, especially around the ears, paws, belly, or face
- Recurring ear infections or signs of ear irritation
- Gastrointestinal issues such as vomiting, diarrhoea, loose stools, or excess flatulence
- Red, inflamed skin or frequent licking of specific areas
- Chronic or recurrent anal gland problems
- Poor coat condition – dryness, dullness, or patchy hair loss
- Behavioural changes – restlessness or discomfort, especially after meals

Of course, these symptoms could have other causes, so it's important to rule out parasites, environmental allergies, or other medical conditions before focusing solely on food.

Which Ingredients Cause the Most Problems?



Protein sources are the most common culprits in food allergies—chicken, beef, dairy, and wheat tend to top the list. However, any ingredient has the potential to cause a reaction, and each dog is different.

Food intolerances often involve certain grains, preservatives, artificial additives, or even fat levels that don't agree with an individual dog's digestive system.

What to Do if You Suspect a Food Reaction

If you notice any of the signs above and suspect your dog's food might be the issue, the first step is to consult your vet. They may recommend a food trial or elimination diet to help pinpoint the ingredient causing the problem.

This usually involves feeding a very simple, limited-ingredient diet for 8–12 weeks, containing a novel protein and carbohydrate that your dog hasn't eaten before. If symptoms improve, you can gradually reintroduce ingredients one at a time to identify the trigger.

It's important not to make drastic changes without guidance, as sudden diet shifts can cause further digestive upset.

Prevention and Long-Term Management

Once the problem ingredient is identified, long-term management usually means avoiding it entirely. Fortunately, there are many high-quality diets available that cater to sensitive dogs.

At the Natural Dog Food Company, we believe that fewer, better ingredients are often the key to better health. Our recipes are made using a short list of natural ingredients, with no artificial additives, fillers, or unnecessary extras—making them a good choice for dogs with known sensitivities or those looking for a more straightforward, wholesome diet.

Final Thoughts

Food allergies and intolerances can be distressing, but with careful observation and a methodical approach, they are manageable. By staying alert to the early signs and working closely with your vet, you can help your dog feel comfortable, energetic, and happy again.

And remember—what goes into your dog's bowl matters. Feeding a natural, balanced diet that suits their individual needs is one of the best steps you can take for their long-term health.