



ALLERGIES - LET'S SCRATCH THE ITCH



All dogs are prone to allergies and Rhodesian Ridgebacks are no exception. Having had a dog that has suffered her entire life with allergies, I know how frustrating and costly this can be and the impact it can have on your dog is devastating. I hope this article will share some insight into the main causes of allergies and simple advice and tips that may help you and help your dog.

There are a few things I hear and see frequently, especially when people are concerned their dog is displaying allergy symptoms -

“It’s Chicken - cut out all chicken” “Don’t give eggs” “Put them on a hypo-allergenic diet” “Put them on an elimination diet”

You get the picture.....

Whilst true food allergies or intolerance may be the root cause for some dogs, the potential removal of proteins, sources of vitamins and minerals from a diet, especially in raw fed dogs, may have a harmful effect in the long term. If this is not replaced with other sources, then this could lead to other problems in the future. Therefore, caution is advised before going down this road.

True food allergies are very rare in dogs, and your vet should be consulted in all cases if you feel your dog’s symptoms are related to food. Symptoms would include:

Gastro-intestinal upset: Vomiting (especially after eating), diarrhoea, loose stools, weight loss, excessive flatulence, upset stomach.

Skin/coat - Persistent itching (Not seasonal), chewing paws, hair loss, licking, recurrent infections - bacterial or yeast, Sore, inflamed ears.

Food intolerance is slightly different and is usually related to the gut health of the dog, and conditions like Leaky Gut- see below for more information. I could write a whole article just about this, but this link will give you an insight into what this is, and how to identify it in your dog

<https://www.dogsnaturallymagazine.com/leaky-gut-syndrome-in-dogs/>

It would always be a good idea to look at what you are feeding your dog when allergies appear, and hopefully we all strive to feed our dog the best possible diet – budget and time factors allowing! But please be mindful that if things are not improving it may be because the allergy is not diet related or is not the whole picture. You may be unlucky to have a dog that has a sensitized immune system and may have allergies to multiple things.

I did all of this for my dog over several years – she had a raw fed diet from 8 weeks old, removing proteins, cutting out carbohydrates - mainly in dog treats as they have hidden ingredients, adding in supplements and trying holistic and herbal remedies. For us this has had some success but has not gotten rid of her allergies. We now “manage” them, knowing when to start treatments, what not to feed and adding in supplementation to her diet during the tricky times - usually spring! Which leads me on to the next type of allergies that crop up in our four-legged pals.

Seasonal Allergies

Common environmental triggers include- Pollen, dust mites, chemicals (especially around farmland), Tree pollen, fleas etc.

These occur usually when spring arrives, depending on which triggers your dog has and can appear as

- Sudden itching/scratching
- Excessive licking of paws, legs
- Sore, itchy, inflamed ears
- Rubbing their faces on the furniture/carpet
- Hot spots on their skin - Wet Dermatitis - caused by excessive licking/scratching.

If these symptoms do occur, then obviously we would always recommend seeking veterinary advice. However, there are also lots of simple things you can also do at home to help your dog.

- After a walk, wash down your dog's legs and feet, or any part of their body that has been exposed to long grass etc., as this will remove the pollen from the skin and prevent them from ingesting it when they clean themselves. I use a diluted mild dog shampoo sometimes, plain water or a damp cloth depending on how exposed your dog has been. Mine love running through fields so are usually covered!
- Regular washing of bedding/blankets - especially in warm, humid weather where dust mites/mold spores can multiply quickly.
- Regular bathing/Grooming of your dog - we all know Ridgebacks think they will melt in contact with water, but this can keep skin healthy and the time spent regularly, means you monitor your dog's skin health by inspecting them frequently.
- Look out for sore skin and apply skin barrier cream before (especially on feet/legs) and after walks – this helps reduce the contact the pollen has with the skin and provides moisture and nourishes the skin at the same time.
- Avoid walking in areas that have lots of long grass, farmland, trees etc. if you think this may be contributing to your dog's symptoms

- Try to keep a log of symptoms- when they occur, walks undertaken, diet/treat changes etc.- this may help you narrow down the culprit.

Nutrition and Supplementary support for dogs with allergies

Supporting a dog with allergies also means looking at what you are putting in their bowls. Whilst this is general advice for any type of allergy, I have learnt by trial and error over the years so these tips may be useful to some of you.

Make friends with the main ingredients of your dog's food. Whether that be Raw, Kibble, Home prepared, wet, cooked - whatever. If you are familiar with the ingredients and can reassure yourself that they are all benefiting your dog's health - then fantastic!

If you feed a food that has a lot of "stuff" listed on the ingredients you don't know – then research it, find out exactly what your dog is eating every day. It may be that some of these things are contributing to the problem.

I know good quality dog food is expensive, but honestly giving your dog a good quality diet will pay dividends in the future. I am not here to promote any type of particular diet, but buy the best your budget allows and add variety to the bowl as often as you can – oily fish i.e. Sardines/sprats, whole eggs, leafy green veg like Kale, spring greens, cruciferous veg - Cauliflower, broccoli, fresh fruit - such as berries, the occasional bit of apple, kiwi etc., Kefir or natural yoghurt once a week. This may improve your dog's gut health and in turn make their immune system more resilient.

For example - our dog was always worse after eating Lamb, especially Lamb tripe- turns out it was because the sheep were grass fed and that was contributing to her problem. We have stopped feeding this now, but it took me a while to figure this out as she has quite a varied diet. Also, many raw food companies don't distinguish between beef or lamb tripe in their recipes, cue lots of label reading and avoiding anything that just said "Tripe".

As I have previously said - I could write for weeks about diet, and diet related health-that may be one for the future! But for the purposes of this article, below are some of the things I have personally used, tested or had recommended to me by people that have really helped my dog. ** Please note- none of these products are endorsed by either me or the MNRRC**

- Add in a pre/pro-biotic – Ones I have personally used are Goats Milk powder (Fettle and Karnlea), Soil based probiotics (Four Leaf Rover, Adored Beast). We do these on a rotation – so a few weeks on/off etc. for maximum effectiveness.
- Look at herbal supplements- we have used Dorwest Green Relief and Garlic and Fenugreek tablets for years now, starting them a month or so before allergy season and stopping late summer.
- Omega 3, 6 supplements- dog friendly ones – Proflax do a great range, usually equine stores sell ones that are suitable for dogs too like the Gold Label range.
- Apple cider vinegar (with the mother)- 1-2tsp per day on their food.
- Avoid lots of carbohydrates if your dog suffers from Yeast problems- Carbs feed the yeast! Refer back to the ingredients on your dog food and dog treats.

So that's about it from me this time, I hope this article has been helpful in some way. It goes without saying that if anyone needs any help or advice then please get in touch with me Kelly Millward, Health Coordinator at Healthcoordinator@ridgebacks.org.uk.