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Food Is Medicine

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Food is Medicine: How Can Changing Your Pet's Diet Affect Their Health?

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Sponsor: Dr. Melissa Magnuson, DVM -Canobie Lake Veterinary Hospital LLC

A common concern of pet owners is that their pets have pruritus (itchiness) leading to many types of dermatitis including atopic dermatitis. According to the Merck Veterinary Manual dermatitis is defined as inflammation of the skin that can be produced by numerous agents, including external irritants, burns, allergens, trauma, and infection (bacterial, viral, parasitic, or fungal)¹. Many cases are often believed to be caused by a diet sensitivity, which means there may be an adverse reaction in the body to a specific ingredient or there may be a true food allergy caused by an immune-mediated response². Pruritus is the most common sign, and can often lead to skin lesions or infections. The difficulty of chronic dermatitis issues in our pets is that it is often hard to distinguish the specific cause, as the specific tests used are unreliable and often too expensive for owners. This leads to recurrent and chronic skin issues in our pets.

Therefore to assess and demonstrate the effectiveness of changing a pet's diet can have on dermatitis, I focused on five patients at Canobie Lake Veterinary Hospital LLC who are believed to have chronic skin issues due to diet sensitivities. To assess the effect a diet can have on one's health my sponsor and I partnered with Primal Pet Foods who provided food to these patients for a trial lasting eight weeks. Each patient was recommended a specific diet based on their current diet and the signs of pruritus (or dermatitis) they exhibited. Throughout the trial, owners were instructed to slowly wean their pets over to this new diet and then continue to feed strictly according to the recommended diet for eight weeks that I helped to develop. The diets chosen consisted of raw food based formulas with quality protein sources. This was presented in several different feeding forms including nuggets, patties, scoop and serve, and freeze dried meals. The multiple different forms provided owners with several options for easy transition in the case that their pets were picky eaters. The results of this study showed positive effects of the diet that went beyond simply improving dermatitis signs but also improving overall health. This study provided valuable information that Primal Pet Foods and other veterinarians can use in the future and will hopefully prompt future studies with larger sample sizes to obtain even more positive data.

Choosing this study came from my interest in the nutrition of our pets and how we can provide our pets with the best diet possible for not only their current conditions but also their overall health and well being. Ultimately food can be medicine and can improve a pet's life without being on constant medications for life for these types of chronic skin issues like dermatitis.

¹ Moriello, K. A. (2018). *Dermatitis - Integumentary System*. Retrieved December 8, 2018, from <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/integumentary-system/integumentary-system-introduction/dermatitis#v4503085>

² Watson, T. D. (1998). *Diet and Skin Disease in Dogs and Cats [Abstract]*. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 128(12), 2783S-2789S. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/128.12.2783S>

