

Otis THE BOYKIN SPANIEL

by Magda Fernandez

People who meet little Otis always comment on his friendliness, sparkling energy, and lustrous coat. They wouldn't know that, in spite of his healthy appearance, Otis has chronic food allergies. The reason this isn't obvious is because, after much trial and error, they're finally under control. Pat has asked me to share what I've learned in managing Otis' food allergies in the event it is of help to you. As you read, please keep in mind that what is working for Otis might not work for your dog.

Otis started scratching his coat and licking his paws during the summer at 17 weeks of age. At first, I assumed that it was a seasonal allergy. But when his scratching and licking intensified into the late fall, I began to suspect a food allergy instead. After trying different high-quality food brands with little results, I took Otis to a veterinary nutritionist for guidance. She opened my eyes about all the unlabeled, allergy-triggering ingredients that can be found in processed dog foods. We confirmed that Otis had food allergies when he stopped scratching within a few days after starting a prescription limited diet. What I didn't like, however, was that Otis didn't savor his new food at all, and wasn't gaining enough weight even on copious amounts.

What no traditional vet seemed to address was why Otis had food allergies in the first place, especially since they don't run in the Hollow Creek bloodline. The best that they could offer was steroids, a regimen of allergy shots, medicated shampoos, and a bland prescription diet. Not convinced, I decided to seek alternative veterinary medicine instead.

I found better answers at a holistic veterinary clinic. Trained in traditional and holistic medicine, this new vet correlated the start

of Otis' symptoms to his 1st year DHHP and rabies vaccines. In her opinion, Otis is one of many unfortunate dogs that have suffered a collective hit from these vaccines. Remember how Otis kept eating mud and found dog poop during our walks? The holistic vet told me that this, too, in addition to the food allergies, was another autoimmune symptom from vaccines. Researchers, such as Dr. Jean Dodds, are tracing many autoimmune conditions to these vaccines, and are mounting statewide efforts to require advance titering, vaccinations after 9-10 weeks of age, and dosing according to weight.

To repair Otis' immune system, his holistic vet recommended that we exempt Otis from future vaccinations with a letter of waiver and titers; wean Otis off all unnecessary chemicals; use non-toxic remedies and products whenever possible; and feed him an organic home-cooked or raw diet with supplements. She did tell me to continue giving him his monthly heartworm medication because there is no alternative preventative or cure for heartworm. Although she urged me to seek alternative flea/tick preventatives, I had to resort to a conventional one because none of the natural preventatives worked on Otis, and we live in a Lyme hot-spot.



The results over the past year have been excellent. Otis has stopped scratching and eating poop completely, and eats his raw diet heartily. I opted for the raw diet because

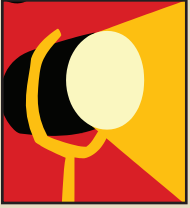
cooking does eliminate some nutrients in the process. I want Otis to extract every ounce of nutrient possible to strengthen his immune system. He deserves it! Otis' former agility trainer referred me to a reputable and affordable bulk raw meat vendor that services the northeast, too.



Every week I rotate servings of raw duck frames, lamb, and venison. Otis eats 2 meals a day. One of those meat meals contains 30% raw, coarsely ground, non-weight bearing bones. The other meat meal contains select raw vegetables that I pulp in a food processor. I do the latter because dogs' intestines cannot break down cellulose on their own. Twice a week I feed him a raw duck heart or other offal. I add a prebiotic, probiotic, and fish oil to each meal, and feed him one yeast-free vitamin daily. I have found that another key to keeping the "itchies" at bay is to keep rotating the meat types every week. Even though he tolerates select meats, they eventually make him itch if I don't switch them.

I won't lie: a raw diet definitely is way more time-consuming to prepare and more expensive than processed dog food. It would cost far less if Otis were not allergic to chicken or beef, or if I had hunting buddies who could regularly supply meat. Fortunately, our raw meat vendor charges only a third of supermarket meat prices and is willing to grind meat bones, too. The way I see it, I'd rather put my

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Spotlight on ... Hank Castro



Picture above taken at Florida's
only rapids located at Hillsborough
river state park.
- John S. Castro
of Tampa, FL

Otis the Boykin Spaniel

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money in a raw diet than in expensive medical treatments that could worsen Otis' immune system in the process.

Now that I select every ingredient that goes into Otis' meals, I've been able to identify foods that he can't tolerate, without subjecting him to painful, expensive allergy tests and harsh steroids. I take comfort in knowing that Otis eats the highest quality, human-grade canine diet possible. For me, this diet is Otis' best long-term shot at restoring his immune system and, hopefully, at staving off future issues.

This experience also has taught me to approach all types of veterinary care with a healthy, critical eye. So for now, Otis goes to the holistic vet for vaccine waivers, titers, nutrition, and comprehensive perspective, and to traditional vets for select specialty care, diagnostic testing, and any future surgical and emergency care.

