

## Observations on Life with an Allergy Dog Part III – Plant Sterols

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Disclaimer: I am not a vet, I am not a physician. I am a concerned guardian of an allergy dog that has suffered terribly over the years while various specialists were stumped and independently came to the same conclusion: "There is nothing else we can do. The only option left is prednisone for life."

I wanted a better life for my dog, so I began my own research. Only your own research can determine what is best for your dog, and you as guardian are solely responsible for those decisions.

For the first several years, we pursued traditional approaches which basically tried to bring relief from the outside in. While we had moderate success, the ongoing suffering finally convinced us to pursue non-traditional holistic approaches.

Major parts of this "alternative" journey included changing to a raw diet (marvelous difference), adopting the Jean Dodds vaccination protocol (instead of 7 shots/year, our dog now gets one shot every three years with blood titers being drawn to confirm her immunity for other issues), and other modifications in how ailments are handled. The latest development, which is the subject of this article, has been the use of plant sterols.

*Plant sterols and "The bloody T-Shirt dog".*

When you have an allergy dog, you form a bond with guardians of other allergy dogs. Information flows freely as we are all looking for a "cure" or new ways to manage allergies. One dog in particular led me to consider the use of plant sterols. Colby was a small mixed breed that would come to agility class wearing a T-shirt. The T-Shirt was the first line of defense against self inflicted wounds... and the T-Shirt often had bloody spots on it. The owner was not negligent in providing clean T-Shirts... the dog was just constantly scratching himself bloody and pulling out clumps of hair. In agility class, his favorite obstacle was the tunnel as he could run in... and then sit and start scratching away until someone would crawl in to chase him out. He was, in a word, a mess.

We were training in different classes, so at one point I didn't see him for several months. When I finally saw him again... I had to do a double take. Colby now looked like he had been replaced by a healthy twin: The T-shirt was gone, he had a thick coat of fur, was running THROUGH the tunnel and looked as happy as could be. I had to ask: "Is this the same dog you had a few months back? What happened?" "Plant Sterols" was the answer. She advised that one other club member had suggested plant sterols as his dog had an allergy problem, and had been on plant sterols for several years with no ill effects.

I then began asking questions, posting requests to our club newsgroup, searching the internet. It was a frustrating exercise as there is very little information to be found regarding their use for allergies in dogs:

- 1) An internet search will tell you that plant sterols are used in humans as a way to reduce cholesterol.
- 2) For use in dogs, an internet search will tell you that several companies have their own "special formula" for plant sterols and that they are good for allergies... but with minimal information... and the formulations differ dramatically.
- 3) A posting to our club newsgroup produced zero replies... which was a shock to me as our membership has a lot of very knowledgeable dog people.
- 4) The only technical papers I ran across were from the mid 1980's.

The dogs mentioned above were introduced to plant sterols by the same vet. The vet works with a pharmacy that formulates the plant sterols for her. Having seen the success with these dogs I decided to visit the same vet.

After an exam and review of her history, my dog was put her on plant sterols and the result was evident - within hours. Prior to plant sterols, training outdoors, outdoor trials, or just being outside when mold and/or pollen counts were up, was something we could not do. Our dog would refuse to go outside on "bad" days. We didn't need to check the daily pollen/mold counts - she would let us know. We have also left behind a sizeable number of unused Agility Trial entry fees because my dog would leave the start line, do one or two obstacles... then sit down and scratch and scratch and scratch.

This year - we are training and trialing outdoors for the first time in her life... and we have not had to put a cone on her since we began using plant sterols in April of 2012. As we entered what is normally her worst time of the year (early fall until snowfall)... we have had a few occasional issues... but these were negligible both in severity and duration compared to past seasons. Please note that I am writing at the end of 2012, one of the worst years for allergies in decades.

What are plant sterols?

The formulation we use is the individual sterol molecule from soy or yams - nothing else, no "secret" formulas. A quick search of the internet will show you that this is definitely NOT the case with other "plant sterol" products.

How so they work?

As explained to me, it acts as cortisol, but unlike synthetic products like prednisone, it is a natural product that attaches to other molecules the way it is supposed to, moderates the immune system... and then is processed completely by the body and is flushed out in about 12 hours. On the other hand, synthetic products attach to things they are not supposed to attach to, and do not get completely flushed out - hence the build up and negative side effects of the synthetic products. Unlike the synthetic products which suppress the entire immune system (and therefore commonly require a course of antibiotics at the same time), the natural plant sterols are taken as is, no additional considerations.

Why do so few people (including vets) know anything about plant sterols?

- 1) Plant sterols are an Eastern medicine approach which is not taught in vet school.
- 2) Many vets that hear of them do not believe in them... with some justification because...
- 3) They do not work in all dogs. Results can range from no effect to near miracle.

The vet we worked with in evaluating and prescribing plant sterols for our dog was:

Kindred Spirits  
Share Siwek  
Evanston, IL 60201  
(847)869-8845

If you have tried all the "usual" approaches, plant sterols are worth considering.