



The Potential Dangers of Grain-Free Foods

There has been a correlation discovered between heart issues in pets and grain-free foods. Veterinary cardiologists have noticed an **increased number of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) cases in dogs who are fed a grain-free diet**. DCM is usually seen in giant and large breed dogs who have a genetic pre-disposition for the condition, but cardiologists are now seeing this disease in a variety of dogs, including medium and small breeds such as Whippets and Shih Tzus. This condition causes pets to have an enlarged, weakened heart, leading to trouble breathing, coughing, syncopal (“passing out”) episodes, fatigue, and eventual heart failure, which can result in death. Currently, veterinary nutritionists and cardiologists, as well as the FDA, are unsure if these DCM cases are caused by the lack of grains in affected dogs’ diets or if there is a specific ingredient in grain-free foods causing these patients to have an enlarged heart. So at this time, **it is recommended to avoid grain-free foods all together**.

Over the years, consumers have been led to believe that grains are harmful fillers in pet food. But, **whole grains provide important minerals, vitamins, essential fatty acids, proteins, and fiber to pet diets**. There have also been implications that many pets have allergies to grains, but **true grain allergies are rare among dogs**. When pets have true food allergies, they are often allergic to the main protein source in the diet, rather than to grains in their food. If you suspect that your pet may be allergic to grains, we recommend you give us a call so that we can discuss a food trial with a hydrolyzed or novel protein diet prior to you placing your pet on a grain-free food, which could be potentially harmful to your pet’s heart.

If your pet is currently on a grain-free diet, we recommend that you transition your pet off this food over the next 1-2 weeks and onto a diet with the same protein source as your pet’s original food. For more information on how to properly transition your pet onto a new pet food, please see the handout on our website titled “How to Transition Your Pet Onto a New Diet.” Even though the dangers of grain-free diets have been studied mainly in dogs, it is currently recommended that cats avoid these diets as well until more research is conducted.

*For more information on the effects of grain-free diets on heart health, please see this AKC article: <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/nutrition/fda-grain-free-diet-alert-dcm/>