



Making Sense of Canine Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) and Grain-Free Foods

At Champion Petfoods, we understand DCM is a concern for some pet lovers. We've broken down the top five myths using factual evidence.

MYTH 1

Grain-free foods are unsafe and unhealthy.

FACT

Grain-Free foods are safe for healthy dogs and have been fed to them successfully for 35+ years. Well-formulated, grain-free foods offer safe and healthy nutrition, including:

- Protein, which is biologically appropriate
- Essential nutrients like B vitamins
- Help with mild allergies or sensitivities



MYTH 2

Feeding dogs grain-free foods causes DCM.

FACT

DCM is a rare and complex disease where a dog's heart muscle weakens, becomes enlarged and does not pump blood effectively. The condition affects less than 1% of the 77 million pet dogs in the U.S.^{1,2} compared with cancer that affects 1 in 4 dogs³ and obesity that impacts 1 in 3 dogs.⁴

There is no clear link between DCM and diets with or without grain-free foods.²



MYTH 3

Rates of DCM are increasing and are directly linked with grain-free food sales.

FACT

Despite a massive 500% increase in grain-free food sales over the past decade, nearly 20 years of data showed no significant increase in DCM cases or that these foods were linked to an increase in DCM.⁵ Millions of dogs have been eating grain-free diets for years and thrived.

MYTH 4

Legumes, like peas and lentils, often found in grain-free foods, cause DCM.

FACT

Legumes, like peas and lentils, are alternative carbohydrates (to grains) that offer protein, fiber, and hold food together. There are claims that legumes are less digestible and negatively impact taurine levels in dogs. Taurine is an amino acid that contributes to heart and eye health, reproduction and fat digestion.^{6,7}

However, the presence of legumes has not been shown to interfere with digestibility of taurine or the conversion of other nutrients into taurine in the body.^{1,6,7}

There is no clear link between DCM and legumes.



MYTH 5

Changing the diets of dogs with DCM from grain-free food to grain-inclusive food is responsible for their recovery.

FACT

Researchers cannot say if the recovery of dogs with DCM is caused by changing their diet from grain-free to grain-inclusive because:

- Nearly all dogs submitted to FDA as case reports eating grain-free diets with DCM, that recovered after their diet was changed, were also treated with drugs or supplements known to improve heart function.⁸
- Diet change alone has not been adequately studied.⁹

The FDA does not advise that dog owners change the diet of their pets if they are currently eating grain-free foods.¹⁰ The lack of grains in a dog's diet is not linked to the development of DCM, and the presence of grains in a dog's diet does not prevent against DCM.

¹McCauley SR et al. Review of canine dilated cardiomyopathy in the wake of diet-associated concerns. J Anim. Sci. 2020;98(6):skaa155. ²Bellumori TP, Famula TR, Bannasch DL, et al. Prevalence of inherited disorders among mixed-breed and purebred dogs: 27,254 cases (1995-2010). J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc. 2013;242:1549-1555. ³Cancer in Pets. AVMA website. <https://www.avma.org/resources/pet-owners/petcare/cancer-pets>. Accessed August 17, 2021. ⁴Banfield Applied Research and Knowledge. State of Pet Health Report 2017: Spotlight on Obesity. Banfield Pet Hospital, Vancouver, Wash., 2017. ⁵Quest B, et al. Incidence of canine dilated cardiomyopathy, breed and age distributions, and grain-free diet sales in the United States from 2000-2019: A retrospective survey. bioRxiv. 2020;9(2):315770. ⁶Oba PM, et al. Nutrient and amino acid digestibility of grain-free dog foods using the precision-fed cecectomized rooster assay. Poster presented at: AAVN Clinical Nutrition & Research Symposium; June 10th-11th, 2020.; Virtual Conference. ⁷Donadelli RA, et al. A commercial grain-free diet does not decrease plasma amino acids and taurine status but increases bile acid excretion when fed to Labrador Retrievers. Transl. Anim. Sci. 2020;4(3):txaa141. ⁸FDA Investigation into Potential Link between Certain Diets and Canine Dilated Cardiomyopathy. FDA website. <https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/outbreaks-and-advisories/fda-investigation-potential-link-between-certain-diets-and-canine-dilated-cardiomyopathy>. Updated June 27, 2019. Accessed July 8, 2021. ⁹Freid KJ, Freeman LM, Rush JE, et al. Retrospective study of dilated cardiomyopathy in dogs. J. Vet. Intern. Med. 2021;35(1):58-67. ¹⁰Questions & Answers: FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine's Investigation into a Possible Connection Between Diet and Canine Heart Disease (updated June 27, 2019). FDA website. <https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/animal-health-literacy/questions-answers-fda-center-veterinary-medicines-investigation-possible-connection-between-diet-and-diet>. Updated June 27, 2019. Accessed August 17, 2021.