



FDA Investigating Potential Link Between Diet and Heart Disease in Dogs

Report Updated July 2, 2019

On June 27, 2019, the FDA published its third status report regarding a potential connection between grain-free diets and a type of heart disease in dogs known as dilated cardiomyopathy... or DCM.

The Dog Food Advisor initially alerted readers about this issue on July 12, 2018, the day it was first announced by the FDA... and continues to update this report on an ongoing basis.

Link to Grain-Free Dog Food Still Not Conclusive

The FDA has still not discovered why certain dog foods may be associated with the development of DCM. In fact, the Agency now believes the connection between diet and DCM is a complex scientific issue involving multiple factors.

There have been no recalls.

The Agency writes...

“It’s important to note that the reports include dogs that have eaten grain-free and grain containing foods and also include vegetarian or vegan formulations. They also include all forms of diets: kibble, canned, raw and home-cooked.

“Therefore, we do not think these cases can be explained simply by whether or not they contain grains, or by brand or manufacturer.

“... the FDA has received reports about 560 dogs diagnosed with DCM suspected to be linked to diet. Tens of millions of dogs have been eating dog food without developing DCM.”

About DCM

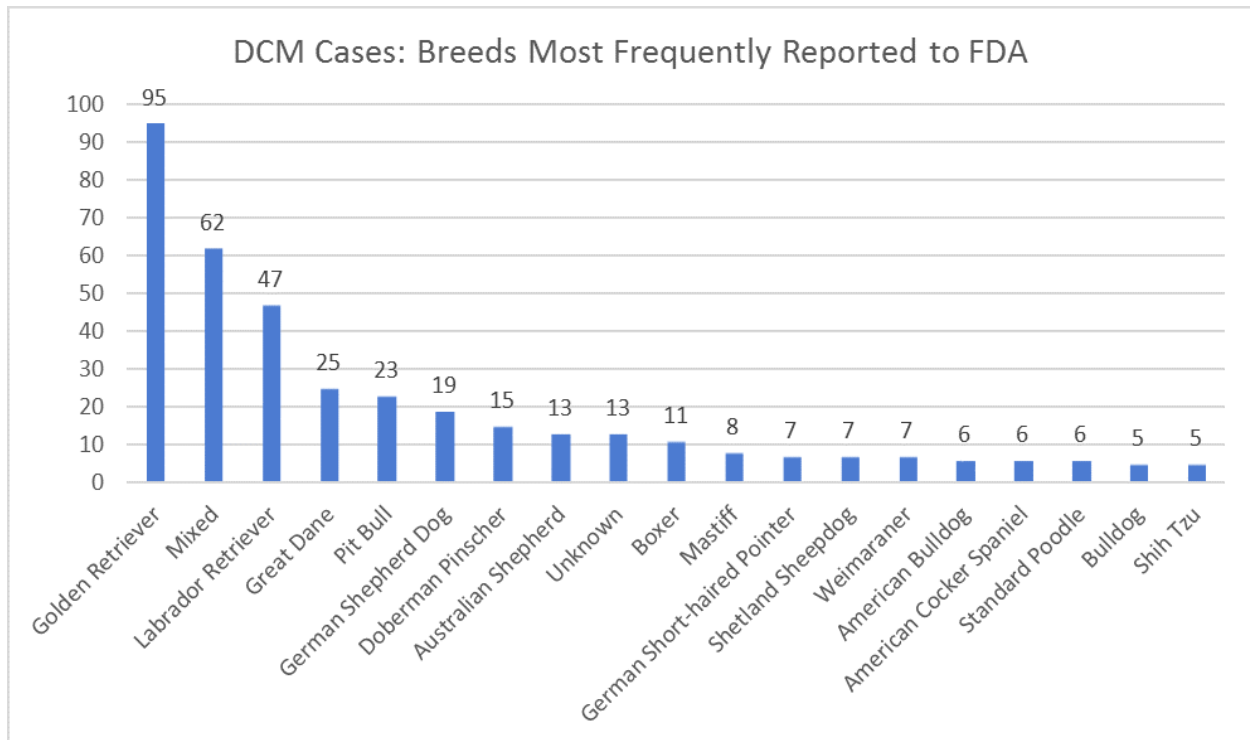
DCM is a disease of a dog’s heart muscle that results in weakened contractions and poor pumping ability...

Which can lead to an enlarged heart and congestive heart failure.

Although the root cause of DCM remains unknown...

And even though initially the condition appeared to be more common in certain breeds...

The FDA has received reports of DCM in a wide range of breeds, including many not genetically prone to the disease.



Link to Diet?

Since announcing its investigation in July 2018...

FDA researchers have observed that most of these DCM cases were associated with animals eating dry dog foods.

However...

Dogs eating raw, semi-moist, and wet diets were also affected.

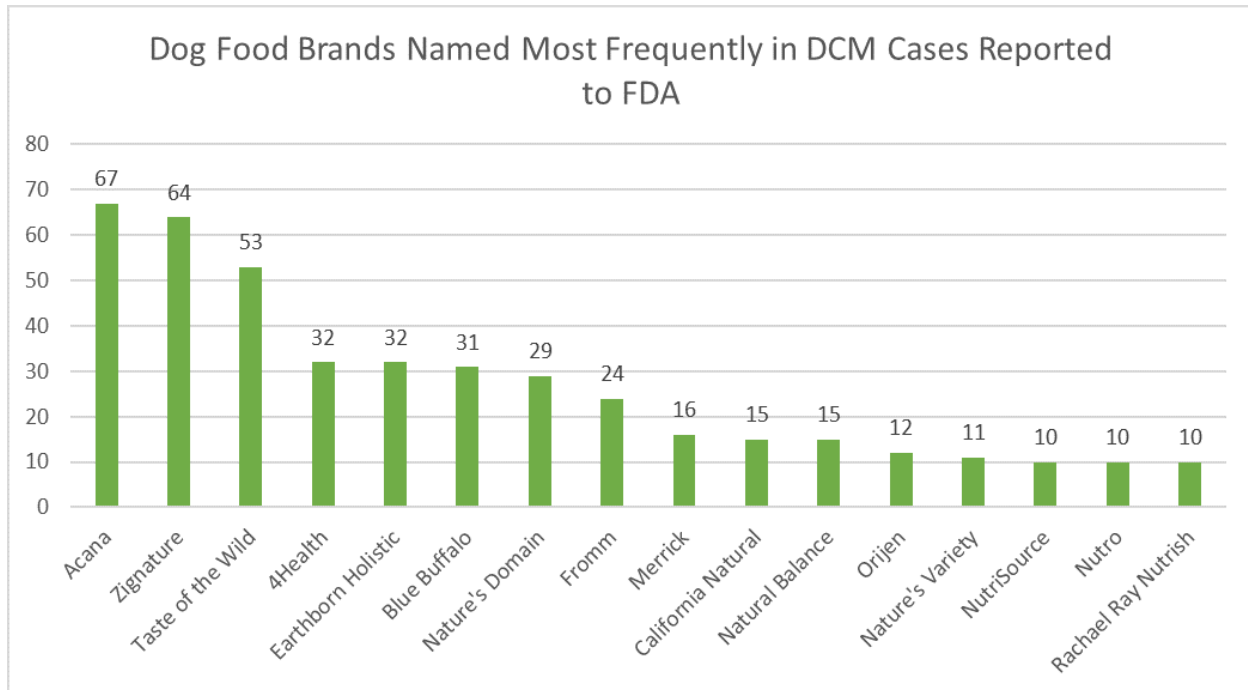
In addition...

Researchers found that over 90 percent of the reported recipes were grain-free. And yet some dogs consumed diets that contained grain, too.

Which Brands?

Only the brands named most frequently in the reports are depicted in the graphic. Could the presence of these brands on the Agency's chart simply be related to their exceptional popularity?

[Click here](#) for a more detailed account of all DCM cases reported to the FDA as of April 30, 2019.



The FDA offers the following observation...

“The prevalence of reports in dogs eating a grain-free diet might correlate also to market share: these products have become exceedingly popular over the last several years.”

Taurine Deficiency?

Even though it's not clear exactly what it is about these diets that may be connected to DCM in dogs, there are a number of possible causes.

For example...

Taurine deficiency is a well-documented, potential cause of some cases of DCM. Yet it's not likely to be the only cause.

In fact...

According to Dr. Lisa Freeman, a veterinary nutritionist at Tufts University, “most dogs being diagnosed with DCM do not have low taurine levels”.

Which means...

It’s not reasonable to assume a taurine deficiency is the definitive cause of DCM.

A Common Thread

According to the FDA, researchers have uncovered one dietary feature common to a large number of DCM cases...

“The common thread appears to be legumes, pulses (seeds of legumes), and/or potatoes as main ingredients in the food. This also includes protein, starch and fiber derivatives of these ingredients...

“Some reports... indicate that the pets were not eating any other foods for several months to years prior to exhibiting signs of DCM.

8 Things You Can Do Right Now to Lower Your Dog’s Risk

Until the FDA completes its study and releases its final report...

The Dog Food Advisor believes it makes sense to apply science and logic to all your feeding decisions.

So, consider these practical tips...

1. Since compared to meat, vegetable protein tends to be incomplete (deficient in certain essential amino acids needed by a dog for life), you may wish to avoid brands that derive most of their protein from legumes and other plant-based protein boosters
2. Don’t avoid any brand just because it contains peas, legumes or potatoes. In reasonable amounts, studies have not found these ingredients to be toxic
3. Avoid brands that list pea protein or other plant-based protein concentrates among their first few ingredients
4. Avoid brands that use the deceptive practice of ingredient splitting to hide the fact that their recipes are dominated by non-meat items... like corn, rice or legumes
5. Not sure about grain-free? Consider switching your dog to a quality food that contains grain

6. Focus on the recipe. Not the brand. To satisfy consumer demand, companies sometimes replace the meat in certain products with cheaper plant-based protein alternatives. Yet they still offer other recipes with superior, meat-rich designs
7. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Diversify. Since no dog food can ever be perfect, consider using diet rotation to lower the risk of endlessly feeding your pet the same imperfect product
8. Need help? Consider switching your dog's current diet to one of the many found on our best dog foods lists

The Bottom Line

Final results are still not conclusive.

And there's no way to know how long the FDA's investigation will take. Yet the Agency is hopeful that as more data becomes known, its scientists will gain a better understanding of the possible connection between diet and DCM.

Until we know the answer...

Be patient.

Don't overreact.

And don't be frightened by all the well-meaning yet misguided advice you'll surely encounter on the Internet.

Or the faulty counsel offered by too many uninformed professionals.

Instead...

Base Your Feeding Decisions on Facts... and Science

For the safety and well-being of your pet, the process of choosing dog food must always include...

1. An accurate analysis of the dog food label
2. A careful evaluation of the company that designs and produces it
3. A study of product reviews by real-life users posted at online retailers

In any case...

The Dog Food Advisor has never favored any recipe just because it's grain free.

Nor should you.

Instead...

Our ratings are heavily weighted in favor of our estimate of each recipe's apparent meat content.

In fact...

Ratings are automatically reduced anytime we find excessive amounts plant-based protein "boosters" (like peas, legumes or non-meat protein concentrates) too close to the top of any ingredients list.

Finally...

Many of the very best dog foods on the market are grain free...

And they're made by some of the most respected companies in the USA and Canada.

We're confident the industry will quickly adapt its recipes to any decisive conclusions reached by the FDA's future findings.

And of course, we'll make any relevant adjustments to our content as needed to reflect these scientific findings (once they become available).

In the meantime...

Our Very Best Advice

Since there's no such thing as a perfect dog food...

And because built-in flaws tend to be magnified when the same food is fed endlessly... day after day for a lifetime.

You may wish to consider diet rotation when feeding your pet.

Most importantly...

Stay informed.