

CARDIOLOGY SERVICE UPDATES: DOG FOOD & DILATED CARDIOMYOPATHY

The Cardiology Service has developed this document in response to the alerts from the FDA. These alerts identify an associated risk for some grain-free diets containing certain ingredients (legumes like peas, pea components, lentils; white potatoes, sweet potatoes) and a diagnosis of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). The links provided throughout this document can be copied and pasted to obtain additional information.

FDA Alerts found here:

<https://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/NewsEvents/CVMUpdates/ucm613305.htm>

<https://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/ResourcesforYou/AnimalHealthLiteracy/ucm616279.htm>

What is Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM)?

DCM is a heart muscle disorder that results in a weak pump function and heart chamber enlargement. In the early stages of this disease pets may appear totally healthy with no apparent clinical signs. Later in the course of this disease, dogs may have a heart murmur, an arrhythmia (irregular heart beat), collapse episodes, weakness or tiredness with exercise, and even trouble breathing from congestive heart failure. While there are some breeds of dogs (like Dobermans) that have a genetic predisposition to development of DCM, there are also nutritional factors that may result in this disease.

What should I do?

If you are feeding a diet of concern based upon the FDA alert we recommend that you consult with your veterinarian or veterinary cardiologist. We provide 4 general points for guidance below:

1. An initial step is to consider whether you are willing or interested in performing additional testing to assess whether your pet is affected with DCM. If you believe your dog is at risk, showing any of the aforementioned clinical signs or would prefer to simply rule out any heart disease, we recommend that you first have your pet's taurine levels tested (both whole blood and plasma levels) as well as seek an echocardiogram by a board-certified veterinary cardiologist. Low taurine levels are associated with development of DCM in dogs and are sometimes a component of this current issue.

Information on taurine testing can be found here: <https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/labs/amino-acid-laboratory>

2. At this time, diet change is recommended when possible and should be considered regardless of the results obtained from any testing. You can consult with your veterinarian in selecting a new diet that avoids the ingredients of concern listed by the FDA. When selecting this diet, we recommend that you choose a diet that is manufactured with rigorous quality control measures and research behind the formulation. A way to ensure that your diet meets these recommendations is to follow the following guidelines that were generated by a large number of the world's leading experts in veterinary nutrition.

Food selection guidelines found here:

<https://www.wsava.org/WSAVA/media/Arpita-and-Emma-editorial/Selecting-the-Best-Food-for-your-Pet.pdf>

*While avoiding all suspect ingredients may be the most direct way to select a new diet, we suggest that a small amount of legume content in a well-formulated grain-inclusive diet may be OK. Our guidelines allow for no more than two legume ingredients in a grain-inclusive diet when found low on the ingredient list (below all meat and grain content). Importantly, these diets should still be tested by AAFCO feeding trial.*

3. If your pet is identified through testing to have a low blood taurine level or evidence of DCM by echocardiogram, we urge you to report this information to the FDA.

FDA reporting guidelines found here: <https://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/ReportaProblem/ucm182403.htm>

4. Work with your veterinarian(s) to determine the best course of action and medical treatments if indicated. In the case of a DCM diagnosis, diet change alone may not be sufficient and additional medications may be prescribed.

Please continue to monitor the FDA website and the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine Newsfeeds for updates and recommendations regarding this issue.