

Dilated Cardiomyopathy, Taurine and Grain-Free Diets 2019

Recently in the news we have again heard that an FDA report has suggested that dogs that have been fed diets over several years, consisting of potatoes, legumes and other starches as the MAIN INGREDIENTS may be at risk of *dilated cardiomyopathy*, a disease of the heart that results in weakened contractions and poor pumping ability. As the disease progresses, the heart chambers become enlarged, one or more valves may leak, and signs of congestive heart failure develop. Typical mass-market grain free, extruded kibbles that feature potatoes, peas, beans, and/or vegetable meals in one or two of the first three ingredients are the diets at the focus of this concern. The recently updated FDA list of pet food products for which complaints have been received includes dehydrated and raw brands as well.

A recent paper published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (June 28, 2019) states that the problem is likely to be related to taurine deficiency, since numerous affected dogs improved after taurine supplementation. Taurine is naturally found only in meat, so it follows that brands relying heavily on potatoes or peas as their top ingredients will pose a greater risk.

What the FDA report should have also pointed out is that these grain-free products supply all of the AAFCO-required vitamins and minerals with the standard, **synthetic vitamin pre-mix used** by most pet food companies (but not by Carna4).

Natural rearing advocates now understand that the body is unable to fully absorb and use synthetic nutrients due to loss of synergy, creating generations of pets that have become nutritionally deficient. This is certainly adding to any health problems created by excessive use of simple starches as main ingredients. Synthesized taurine is usually included with the vitamin pre-mix mentioned above because a lack of this critical amino acid, especially in cats' diets, is known to lead to dilated cardiomyopathy. Taurine occurs naturally only in meat, particularly organ meat like liver, so a diet with insufficient meat or low quality meat meals will require added taurine, in addition to other nutrients. The whole DCM issue and how to avoid it makes sense when you look at these facts: feed whole foods with lots of meat to your pets.

The main ingredients in Carna4 are **meats**. In every Carna4 formula, real meat is the 1st through 4th or 5th ingredient, followed by organic **sprouted** seeds. And when we get to the legumes (fava beans, lentils, peas), they are either minor ingredients down the list or else sprouted if we use a lot of them. Sprouted seeds and legumes are **not** starchy vegetables, and they provide huge health benefits (see our website for further information on the superfood power of sprouted seeds).

And of course, all of the essential vitamins and minerals in Carna4 are always supplied by whole food ingredients, rather than synthetics. Carna4 products provide our pets all the nutrients they require in easy-to-digest and bio-available forms the body recognizes in **real foods** which work synergistically together as nature intended. Carna4 pet foods contain only natural taurine in all of our

products because they contain so much meat. All our grain-free products provide far more taurine than AAFCO standards require, and our grain-free Duck formula is not included on the updated list of complainant's brands.

Interestingly, in the recent JAVMA report, consumers are advised to select the very foods which may be at the root of this problem and to avoid home-cooked and raw diets: *"For dogs in which possible diet-associated DCM is diagnosed, we recommend the owner change the diet to one made by a well-established manufacturer that contains standard ingredients (eg, chicken, beef, rice, corn, and wheat). In the authors' (LMF and JER) hospital, we recommend several specific products with a low sodium content that only contain standard ingredients.³² We also emphasize that changing to a raw or home-prepared diet may not be sufficient to improve cardiac abnormalities and may increase the risk for other nutritional deficiencies or infectious diseases."* All three of the veterinarian authors of the paper admit to receiving support from Nestle and Royal Canin.

In North America we must acknowledge the negative health effects resulting from commercial pet foods that are formulated with synthetic ingredients by marketers rather than holistic nutritionists. The question is not about choosing "grain-free", "single source protein", "zero carbs" or anything specialized. To avoid DCM and other maladies, consider feeding a diet with balanced quantities of only real, whole food ingredients that provide a well-rounded blend of nutrients. When feeding commercial brands we should not see synthetics of any kind on those labels. And most importantly, we should see actual animal proteins –fish, meat, eggs –as the first several ingredients in our pet food. Nature takes care of it from there.

M. Ringo July 2019