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## Animal Medical Center at Fort Sheridan

# Dog Food Causing Heart Disease!!

While heart disease has always been quite common in dogs, it appears that certain dog foods may be increasing dogs' risk for a certain type of heart disease called diet-associated dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM).

**We still have a lot to learn about diet-associated DCM but here is what we do know and what you can do to help protect your dog:**

- 1. It's not just grain-free foods!** The suspected dog foods are called BEG diets – foods made by **BOUTIQUE** companies, diets made with **EXOTIC** ingredients and/or **GRAIN-FREE** diets. The FDA and researchers are looking for the link between BEG diets and DCM. It may be related to ingredients used to replace grains in grain-free diets, such as lentils, potatoes, or chickpeas, or other common ingredients found in BEG diets such as exotic meats (rabbit, lamb, venison, buffalo, kangaroo, etc.), vegetables and/or fruits. There could be nutritional imbalances in BEG diets or ingredients that are toxic to the heart.
- 2. Raw and home-cooked diets are not safe alternatives.** Out of concern, some owners are switching from BEG diets to raw or home-cooked diets. However, DCM has been diagnosed in dogs eating these diets also. Forego the raw or home-cooked diets (and vegetarian and vegan too) and stick with a commercial pet food made by a well-established manufacturer that contains common ingredients, including grains.
- 3. More recent cases of diet-associated DCM are NOT related to low taurine levels.** There is a certain form of DCM related to low taurine levels and can be improved with taurine supplementation. More than 90% of dogs with this newer form of DCM (associated with eating BEG diets) have normal taurine levels. Yet many of these dogs improve when their diets are changed, which suggests something else is playing a role in most cases – either a deficiency of a different nutrient or even a toxicity that may be associated with BEG diets. Giving taurine is **UNLIKELY** to treat or prevent DCM unless your dog has taurine deficiency.

### **If your dog has been diagnosed with diet-associated DCM:**

1. Measure taurine levels. Supplement with taurine until results return (which can take up to 2 weeks).
2. If your dog is eating a BEG diet or other non-traditional diet (vegetarian, vegan, home-cooked, etc.), switch the diet. Change other dogs in the household also!
3. Consider screening your other household dogs for heart disease.
4. Don't feel guilty—none of us were aware of this until just very recently!

### **If your dog is eating a BEG diet but has no symptoms:**

1. It is unlikely that most dogs eating a BEG diet will develop DCM, however, until we better understand why BEG diets are affecting some dogs (and not others) and because DCM is life-threatening, we recommend you switch your dog's diet. Contrary to popular belief, there are no major health benefits of grain-free or exotic ingredient diets except in the case of rare food allergy. ***Continuing a BEG diet and adding taurine will not be effective at reducing your dog's risk of heart disease!***

Please remember to tell us what food your dog is eating - Dr. Kordell, Dr. King, & Dr. Matseshe