

# Busting Grain-Free Myths

We see and hear the words 'Grain-Free' on many commercial pet foods, but is grain-free all it's cracked up to be?

We all want the best for our pets, so of course we want to feed them the best diet possible. Many of our clients inform us they are feeding their pets a grain-free diet, which has its benefits, but is it actually the best diet for every pet?

## ALLERGIES

The media and some food companies can lead pet owners to believe that grain-free diets can help every pet with their itchy skin and allergies. Although any food or food ingredient can cause an allergy, it is actually *protein*, usually from the meat source of the food, that is the most likely offender. Proteins commonly found in dog foods are derived from beef, chicken and lamb. In contrast to humans, it is quite uncommon to have an allergy to grain, gluten or preservatives. If you suspect that your pet is itchy, then you may wish to do a diet trial. Ask

your vet about hypoallergenic foods that can be used and how to conduct this food trial. There are also diets that are *hydrolysed*, meaning that all proteins are broken down so tiny that the body does not recognise them to be an allergen.

## CARDIAC AFFECTS

Recently, there have been increased veterinary reports of dogs with a heart disorder named dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). Studies have shown that a deficiency in the amino acid, taurine, could play a role in the development of this disorder. Cats in particular require this amino acid from their food, as they cannot synthesise it in the body. Taurine plays an important role in many biological processes, including producing bile salts necessary for fat digestion and balancing neurotransmitters in the brain. So what does grain-free have to do with taurine? A common factor in a study of dogs that had developed DCM

was that they were on a grain free diet. The concern is that these diets are somehow causing low blood levels of taurine and resulting in taurine-deficiency DCM, even in breeds not normally pre-disposed. Studies are still being performed on the link between taurine and DCM, so it is not entirely conclusive, however is still worth considering.

## TAKE HOME MESSAGE

It is important to remember that every pet is different, and their diet should reflect that. Understanding the nutritional requirements that your pet needs is an important step in this process. Grain-free does not necessarily mean your pet will be allergy-free, and it may actually be doing more harm than good. If you're still unsure, speak to our vets on how to provide your pet with a well balanced diet.

