

Diet Related Dilated CardioMyopathy (DCM)



What is DCM?

Dilated CardioMyopathy is a severe disease of the heart that causes the heart to enlarge and pump weakly, which can result in difficulty breathing, collapse, or even sudden death. It is the second most common heart disease in dogs.

What is the difference between normal DCM and Diet Related DCM?

Normal DCM most commonly affects giant breed dogs (i.e. Dobermans, Great Danes, etc). It is a hereditary disease that can be managed but not cured and will continue to progress, often leading to early or sudden death. *Diet Related* DCM is seen with dogs being kept on a non-traditional diet (i.e. Grain-Free) and will usually resolve by switching away from the non-traditional food.

What non-traditional diets are associated with DCM?

Non-Traditional diets are most commonly grain-free based diets. They may also be unusual protein diets, or diets made by small “boutique” companies, which may not have the same quality control or research capability as larger companies.

What is it about these foods that is the problem?

Scientists aren't totally sure. At first, it was theorized that these diets may be low in an amino acid, taurine, as taurine deficiencies have long been associated with DCM in cats. Unfortunately, not all affected dogs have low taurine, and supplementing with taurine has not been curative. Grain-free diets are also often high in legumes (peas, chickpeas, lentils) or potatoes/sweet potatoes, which are now being investigated. More than 90% of the diet-related DCM cases were fed grain-free, more than 93% contained peas and/or lentils, and more than 41% contained potatoes/sweet potatoes. It is possible that these ingredients contain some chemical(s) that act as an anti-nutrient and blocks something required for normal function.

What can we do to help?

Moving your dog away from the non-traditional diet is the first step to take. If you feel like your pet is showing symptoms of DCM or other heart-disease (i.e. decreased energy, cough, difficulty breathing) you should contact your vet ASAP or seek emergency care.