



The Golden Retriever Club of America, Inc.

Diet-Associated Heart Disease in Golden Retrievers

November, 2018

GRCA shares our members' and other dog owners' concern and distress regarding the potential link between certain diets and the development of a serious heart disease called dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). DCM is a disease of heart muscle that results in an enlarged heart that has difficulty pumping effectively, and that may lead to congestive heart failure and sudden cardiac death. In some cases, DCM may improve if caught early and treated appropriately.

For those not yet aware, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released an alert on July 12, 2018 informing the public of their investigation into a possible connection with pet foods containing legumes such as peas, lentils, other legume seeds, or potatoes as primary ingredients. High levels of legumes or potatoes appear to be more common in diets labeled as "grain-free," but may also appear as main ingredients in foods that are not grain-free. This alert was followed on August 10 by a Questions and Answers release from FDA.

The FDA's investigation began after its Center for Veterinary Medicine received numerous reports of DCM in dogs eating such diets. Many of these reports involved Golden Retrievers, a breed that appears to have been hit particularly hard by diet-linked DCM. Some of the most well-documented reports were from board-certified veterinary cardiologists and nutritionists who had begun their own investigations about two years ago, and currently the FDA is evaluating more than 150 cases of this condition.

These researchers are continuing to follow several leads as to the precise diet-related contributions or other factors involved in the development of this disease. These include taurine deficiency (taurine is an amino acid previously documented as a cause of DCM) due to composition of the food, food processing methods, source of taurine's building blocks in the food, or to the dog's ability to utilize the nutrient.

Based upon previous and ongoing research, Golden Retrievers appear particularly susceptible to taurine deficiency, and taurine screening has demonstrated to be an important diagnostic tool for identifying Goldens with possible DCM. However, not all dogs – and particularly breeds other than Golden Retrievers – with diet-related DCM have been found to be taurine deficient, so this is clearly not the sole cause of this condition. Despite the identified link to taurine deficiency in Goldens, this issue remains complicated for owners, research scientists, and treating veterinarians. Other factors being investigated include fiber content of the food, uncommon or exotic ingredients, small manufacturers that may not have fully tested their food, and genetic ability to process the food.

While this research proceeds, owners are encouraged to be cautious regarding sources for information, as there is much speculation but relatively little scientific literature. GRCA is committed to help educate dog owners and has compiled links to trusted articles for more information and general recommendations. Specific recommendations about individual dogs should be discussed with the dog's veterinarian.

Recommended Sources for Additional Information

From UC Davis researchers

UC Davis Investigates Link Between Dog Diets and Deadly Heart Disease:

<https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/news/uc-davis-investigates-link-between-dog-diets-and-deadly-heart-disease>

Considerations surrounding diet and dilated cardiomyopathy in dogs

https://ccah.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk4586/files/local_resources/pdfs/ucd-diet-and-dcm-handout.pdf

From Tufts University researchers

A broken heart: Risk of heart disease in boutique or grain-free diets and exotic ingredients:

<http://vetnutrition.tufts.edu/2018/06/a-broken-heart-risk-of-heart-disease-in-boutique-or-grain-free-diets-and-exotic-ingredients/>

Questions You Should Be Asking About Your Pet's Food:

<http://vetnutrition.tufts.edu/2016/12/questions-you-should-be-asking-about-your-pets-food/>

From the American Veterinary Medical Association

Unusual pet diets may be linked to heart disease:

<https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/180801e.aspx>

From FDA:

FDA alert released on 7-12-18:

<https://www.fda.gov/animalveterinary/newsevents/cvmupdates/ucm613305.htm>

FDA Questions and Answers released on 8-10-18:

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

News Article (as recommended by Josh Stern, DVM, PhD)

Grain-free, exotic dog food linked to heart disease:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/animalia/wp/2018/08/29/grain-free-exotic-dog-food-linked-to-heart-disease/?utm_term=.d891cf8c2f93