

On [July 12, 2018](#), the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) issued a brief stating that they are investigating case reports of a type of canine heart disease known as dilated cardiomyopathy, or DCM, in dogs not genetically predisposed to the disease. The brief cited a theory that some of these DCM cases may be linked to certain types of diets, and that further research was being undertaken to determine if that theory had merit. Research to better understand DCM and its causes in dogs is underway. The agency released subsequent updates [throughout 2019](#).

Members of the Pet Food Institute (PFI) are committed to the production of safe, nutritionally balanced pet food. PFI is working in close collaboration with internal experts, including company scientists, veterinarians and nutritionists, to advance the understanding of this issue and support a collaborative approach with FDA.

Below, we provide answers to some questions that pet lovers and veterinarians may have about DCM and their dog's diet.

What is dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM)?

DCM is a specific type of heart disease that, in dogs, results in an enlarged heart and can be serious if left untreated. Some dog breeds, such as the Doberman Pinscher, the Great Dane and the Irish Wolfhound, are recognized as genetically prone to this disease. Other breeds, including the Cocker Spaniel and the Golden Retriever, may be deficient in a key amino acid associated with heart health, which can lead to the occurrence of DCM. Symptoms of DCM include a decreased appetite, lethargy, coughing and collapse. Dogs displaying these signs should be taken to a veterinarian immediately. FDA's investigation is specifically focusing on DCM and not canine heart disease as a whole.

What role does diet play in DCM?

The exact cause of reported incidents of DCM has not yet been identified, but genetic predisposition is known to be a highly contributing factor to DCM in dogs in general. FDA has acknowledged that multiple factors may play a role in the occurrence of DCM, including: overall diet, pet food formulation, ingredients, processing, genetics and breeding, and individual pet physiology. It is important to note that the FDA has not determined if there is a dietary link to the development of DCM and does not recommend any dietary changes based solely on the information gathered so far.

What should I be feeding my dog now? Should I change what I am feeding my dog?

The first step you can take is to make sure your dog is receiving a complete and balanced diet that is formulated for his or her life stage. Our interactive infographic series "[Nutrition from Nose to Tail](#)" provides fast facts on why a complete and balanced dog food recipe is critical in supporting your pet's health.

If you have questions about a specific product, we recommend that you contact the manufacturer to learn more. FDA has not advised that pet owners change their dog's diet based on the available information. If your pet does experience a change in health, it is important to consult with your veterinarian.

Should I avoid certain ingredients or grain-free dog food as a whole?

The FDA stated in [July 2018](#) and repeated in [June 2019](#) that the agency does not advise any dietary changes based solely on the information gathered to date.

Millions of dogs eat and are thriving on grain-free dog food. The FDA's investigation includes a focus on certain products marketed as grain-free and specific ingredients in those products. The agency continues its investigation into this complex issue and has not recommended any changes by pet food makers or pet owners.

If you have a question about your dog's food, we recommend that you contact the manufacturer to learn more, and visit "[Nutrition from Nose to Tail](#)" to learn more about the nutrition in a dog food recipe.

Why may pet food makers use certain ingredients in dog food?

Pet food recipes that are formulated to provide complete and balanced nutrition offer the essential nutrients that a pet requires for its specific life stage, and at the proper levels. The ingredients used in dog food will help to deliver those nutrients, and some ingredients may help deliver multiple nutrients. When developing a dog food recipe, pet food makers consider many components, such as an ingredient's nutrient profile, its role in helping the food hold shape, flavor, digestibility and shopper preference.

Are pet food ingredients safe?

Yes. As makers of the sole source of nutrition for America's pets, PFI members hold pet food safety as the number one priority. U.S. pet food makers use ingredients that have been accepted by the FDA, meet the agency's Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) standard, or have been recognized by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). For more information about how pet food and its ingredients are regulated, [click here](#).

Are there new research findings that indicate whether there is a connection between DCM and diet?

Significant research is underway that may answer many questions regarding what role, if any, diet may play in the occurrence of DCM. To date, available information suggests that the development of DCM in dogs not genetically predisposed to the disease is a complex issue with multiple confounding factors.

What are PFI members doing with this new research?

PFI members are individually and collectively examining the role of diet in pet health, including DCM in particular. Member company nutritionists, veterinarians and product safety specialists are closely studying available new information and engaging with PFI to advance pet food makers' understanding of any potential connection between DCM and diet.