**Food for Thought: Are Grain Free Diets the Best?**

It’s Shelby with Antrim Veterinary Hospital and we are going to discuss nutrition. Grain free diets have become very popular amongst pet owners. Afterall, we want to feed our pets the best diet we can to keep them healthy and people are going grain free. However, did you know that feeding a grain free diet may do more harm than good?

Let’s start with the basics; a grain free diet is simply a food made without grains. Common grains include barley, corn, oats, rice, wheat, rye, sorghum, and soy. Grains are carbohydrates which are needed for energy and supply the body with fiber to promote healthy digestion. Grains also include essential nutrients and essential fatty acids for dogs. Grain free doesn’t mean low carb. In fact, these foods are made with potatoes and pea flour which can cause weight gain.

Contrary to belief, grains are rarely the cause of food allergies. Only 10% of pets have food allergies and of those less than 1% are grain allergies.

So why are grain free diets potentially harmful to your pet? Well, a recent study found there may be a link between feeding grain free diets and dilated cardiomyopathy. Dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) is when the heart loses its muscle strength, enlarges, and then is unable to pump blood through the body as effectively. DCM is already a known issue for certain large breed dogs, however, when the condition began appearing in breeds that don’t typically have DCM and especially in smaller breeds it caught the attention of veterinarians. Further investigation revealed the majority were being fed a grain free diet. Most of the diets were dry food but semi-moist, wet, and raw diets were also included. The FDA named 16 brands of dog food that accounted for the vast majority of the cases reported. Most cases were reported in dogs but some cats were affected as well. For a complete list visit the FDA website (<https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/news-events/fda-investigation-potential-link-between-certain-diets-and-canine-dilated-cardiomyopathy>).

There is no significant proven benefit to feeding a grain free diet. If there is no clinical reason to feed one, then don’t. If you are currently feeding a grain free diet talk to your veterinarian before transitioning to a new diet. We do not recommend suddenly stopping any diet without doing a transition. More information regarding the possible link between heart disease and nutrition is available at <https://www.cvcavets.com/for-veterinarians/nutrition-grain-free/>. Another great resource for pet nutrition is <https://vetnutrition.tufts.edu/>. In August’s addition we will discuss how to pick the perfect diet for your pet. For nutritional guidance please call us at 410-751-0091.