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## Pet Diets



Choosing a diet for your pet is a task that should not be taken lightly. Grain free and gluten free pet diets have become extremely popular. This popularity has mirrored the appearance of similar products for people. These diets are particularly helpful for people that have celiac disease, intolerance to glutens in general, or allergies to wheat.



Many pet owners choose to mimic their own food choices when choosing a food for their pet. With the increase in the number of people choosing to consume a grain free or gluten free diet, pet food manufacturers have recognized that similar pet diets are attractive to pet owners. The popularity of these diets has led to an increase in the number of grain free and gluten free diets available for pets.

Are these diets the best choice for your pet? How do you know if your pet needs a grain free or gluten free food?

### Grain Free Versus Gluten Free

Let's start by discussing the difference between a grain free and a gluten free diet. Grain free foods are, as the name implies, diets that do not contain grain. Gluten free food, on the other hand, may or may not contain grain as an ingredient. Gluten is the protein that is found in specific types of grain, namely wheat, barley, and rye. Gluten free food is, of course, free of these proteins. However, not all grains contain gluten. Therefore, gluten free food may or may not be grain free, while grain free food will always be gluten free.

### What Is Grain Free Pet Food, Really?

Grain free pet foods are currently very popular. But are they really healthier for your pet than other types of pet foods? Let's take a closer look at that question.

While it is true that many pets do well on grain free diets, it is also true that these diets were developed more in response to consumer (i.e., human) preference than to the actual nutritional needs of our pets.

Nutritionally, the most important aspect of a pet food is whether the food provides complete and balanced nutrition. If the food contains excesses or deficiencies of specific nutrients, the pet will suffer as a result. This concept is true regardless of whether the food contains grains or not.

Each ingredient in the diet provides a unique set of nutrients to the overall makeup of the food. Together, the ingredients need to combine to provide a complete nutrient profile for your pet, without any excesses or deficiencies that can cause illness for your pet. It is certainly possible for grain free diets to provide this type of complete nutrition for your pet. However, these diets are not the only option, or even necessarily the best option, for each individual pet. There is no one diet or type of diet that is perfect for all pets. In other words, no pet food is a one-size-fits-all nutritional solution.

### What About Cat and Dog Food Allergies?



Another popular misconception that many pet owners fall victim to is the assumption that grain free diets are the best diets for pets with food allergies. While food allergies do occur in pets, corn and other grains are not among the most common allergens found in foods.

In fact, according to some of the available research, corn is actually one of the least likely sources of food allergy. In one literature review<sup>1</sup>, 278 dogs with food allergy were evaluated and the problem ingredient was clearly identified for each dog. Beef was the most common allergen, being responsible for 95 of the cases reported. Dairy was responsible for 55 cases, making it the second most frequent cause. Corn was identified as the offender in only 7 cases. In cats, the situation is similar. Fifty-six cats were evaluated in this study<sup>2</sup>. Forty-five of the food allergies resulted from eating beef, dairy, and/or fish. Corn, meanwhile, was responsible for only 4 cases.

Feeding a grain free diet is a legitimate option for your pet. However, feeding a grain free diet still requires choosing a diet that includes complete and balanced nutrition for your pet. Choose ingredients with which you, as a pet owner, are comfortable. But remember that in the long run, it is the nutrient profile that is important, not the individual ingredients in the pet food.

As with all things related to your pet's health, your veterinarian is your best source of information regarding pet foods. Your veterinarian is knowledgeable about all types of pet food and can help you determine the type of diet that is best for your pet.

For pets that truly do have allergies to grains, a grain free diet would be an appropriate choice. The following are symptoms that would be expected in cats & dogs that have food allergies (or other types of allergies):

- Itchiness
- Excessive hair loss
- Bald patches
- Inflamed skin
- Sore and scabs
- "Hot spots"

A food trial with a grain free food would be necessary to determine whether the food is beneficial for your pet.

**For More Information:**



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