

GRAIN FREE? OR NOT?

Adapted from article Grain-Free Pet Foods- Fact v Fiction by Kara Burns, MS,Med,LVT,VTS

Pet owners seem to believe that grain free diets are better for their pets because they assume they are more natural, carbohydrate-free, and less likely to result in health problems, but this is not the case.

MISPERCEPTIONS:

WHOLE GRAINS MAY BE FILLERS IN PET FOOD-

The word “filler” implies that there is little to no nutrition value, but whole grains supply vital nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, and essential fatty acids to foods. Various grain products can also be a source of protein, and can be easier to digest than the protein from meat products. Most dogs and cats utilize 90% of the nutrients found in grains in pet foods.

GRAIN FREE FOOD IS CARBOHYDRATE FREE-

Grain free foods typically contain carbohydrates from other sources such as sweet potatoes which have actually a higher carbohydrate level than corn does. Grains are carbohydrates with are an important energy source and are one of the 6 basic nutrients (ie water, protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals).

These grain-free diets mean a variety of nutritional profiles, which can affect the protein, fat and other nutrients in addition to the carbohydrates. A grain-free diet may mean lower carbohydrates but have a higher amount of fat and calories. Some grain –free diets substitute the grains with a highly refined starch that may deliver fewer nutrients and less fiber and are thus not cost efficient. Some of the products which are used to replace the grain may not be any better than the grain food and may not help with any GI upset.

GRAINS CAUSE FOOD ALLERGIES

Food intolerance and allergies represent an abnormal response to a food or an ingredient.

GRAINS CAUSE GLUTEN INTOLERANCE

Celiac disease is an inherited autoimmune disease seen in humans that has been associated with hypersensitivity to gluten proteins in wheat and related grains such as barley and rye. Gluten intolerance is extremely rare in dogs and hasn't been seen in cats.

So in summary one should base their food decisions on the health of the animal and not only on the ingredients.