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Grain-Free Dog Food



By Adrienne Warber

A grain-free diet is becoming a popular alternative to mainstream dog food. Proponents of a grain-free dog food consider it hypoallergenic and closer to a dog's natural diet than average modern dog food. Learn about grain-free diets and whether they might be a healthy option for some pets.

Ad

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Where to Buy Grain-Free Diets

Shopping online may be the best option for finding grain-free diets in some locations.

The following websites sell grain-free pet food brands:

- **PetSmart** carries Nutro, Blue Buffalo, Wellness and EVO.
- **PETCO** sells Natural Balance, Before Grain, Wellness, Nutro and Blue Buffalo.
- **Pet Food Direct** offers a large selection of grain-free dog food brands, including Orijen, Taste of the Wild, Blue Buffalo, Wellness, Nature's Variety, Canidae, Before Grain, Nutro, Back to Basics, EVO and Fromm.
- **Hearty Pet** carries Acana, Canidae, Taste of the Wild, Back to Basics, Before Grain, Fromm, Orijen and Nature's Variety.

Top Grain-Free Pet Food Brands

While grain-free formulas have not been adopted by large pet food brands, there are a number of holistic and natural pet food companies that offer these diets. These companies offer dry and canned formulas. Some also specialize in raw diets. Top brands with grain-free formulas include:

- Fromm: Dry
- **Blue Buffalo**: Dry and canned
- **Taste of the Wild**: Dry and canned
- Orijen: Dry
- **Natural Balance**: Dry and canned
- Nutro: Dry and canned
- Wellness: Dry and canned
- Natura Pet's **EVO** brand: Dry and canned
- **Back to Basics**: Dry food
- Merrick's **Before Grain** (B.G.): Dry and canned
- **Nature's Variety**: Raw
- Canidae: Dry and canned

Read independent reviews of these brands at sites like [Dog Food Advisor](#) and [RateItAll.com](#). The [Dog Food Project](#) also had extensive reviews on holistic dog food brands.

Benefits of Grain-Free Dog Food

Grain-free pet diets emerged to help dogs with food allergies and sensitive stomachs that had problems digesting the high-grain content common in many commercial dog foods. These formulas come in both dry and canned forms. The recipes generally have a higher meat and protein content, less carbohydrates and more digestible animal fats than the average grain-based dog food.

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Canine Health Problems and Digesting Grain

Some dogs have trouble digesting grains, especially corn grain, wheat and soy, which are common in many dog food formulas. Eliminating these grains can sometimes improve a dog's digestion. Dogs with health conditions like allergies, celiac disease, canine inflammatory bowel disease or a predisposition to bladder stones, may respond well to a grain-free diet.

Considerations Before Going Grain-Free

Eliminating grain from a dog's diet is a big step and some veterinarians feel that dogs need foods that incorporate whole grains in the recipes for total nutrition. Proponents of dog foods that utilize grains argue that whole grains like oats, whole wheat, buckwheat, barley and brown rice can provide beneficial minerals, vitamins, fatty acids, fiber and protein.

Some dog food experts believe grains are not a problem for dogs. Pet food expert Dr. Marion Nestle, the Paulette Goddard professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University and author of "[Feed Your Pet Right](#)," The Authoritative Guide to Feeding Your Dog and Cat," stated that dogs are "perfectly able to digest grain if they are cooked," in a [2010 New York Time pet food article](#).

Veterinarian [Dr. Susan G. Wynn](#), the blogger at the [Pet Health and Nutrition Blog](#), argues that grains provide many health benefits to dogs in the form of vitamins, minerals and fiber. She also says that dogs can digest grains through pancreatic amylase and other enzymes that aid the digestion of starchy carbohydrates.

Pros and Cons of Grain-Free Pet Diets

Pet owners should examine the pros and cons of dog food without grains when considering switching to a grain-free food.

Pros:

- Dogs foods without grains may be easier for some pets to digest because many dogs lack the digestive salivary amylase enzyme, which aids the breakdown of starch carbohydrates into simple sugar compounds. Without the enzyme, digestion problems can occur.
- In independent reviews for grain-free dog food brands, such as [RateItAll.com's Natural Balance reviews](#), pet owners who have successfully fed their dogs grain-free diets claim that skin and digestive allergy conditions often significantly improve.
- The grain-free formulas often have larger ratios of meat in the ingredients, which provides a healthy protein source for dogs. Since dogs are natural carnivores, diets with high-meat content may aid the digestion of dogs, especially those intolerant of grain-based foods.

Cons:

- Grain-free diets are not widely accepted by traditional veterinarians and are more popular among holistic veterinarians. Some pet owners desiring to switch a pet to a grain-free diet may find their vet opposed to the idea.
- A number of the brands are difficult to find in some locations.
- These formulas are often more expensive than the average dog food.

Consult with Your Veterinarian

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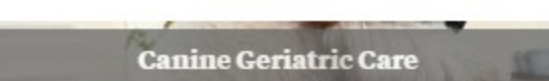
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Consult with Your Veterinarian

Always consult with your veterinarian before switching your dog to a new diet. The veterinarian can give you a better idea of whether or not a grain-free diet would work for your pet based on its health history.

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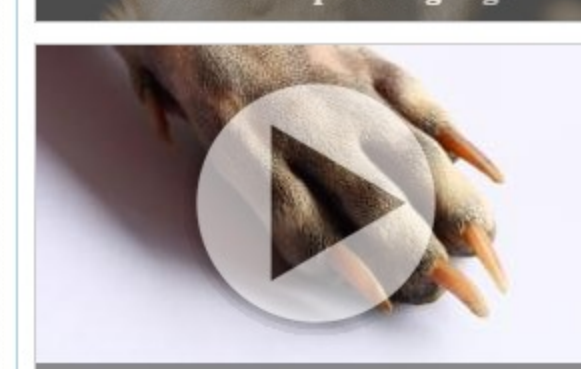
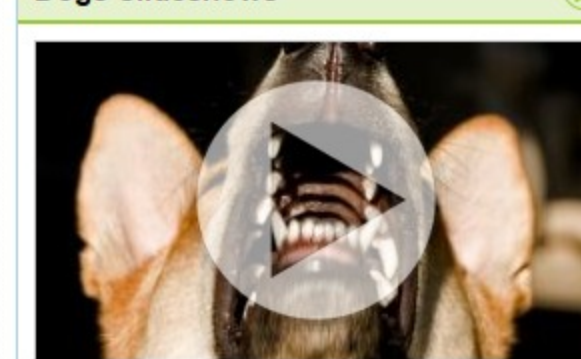
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