



Feeding Philosophies

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEEDING GLUTEN-FREE DIETS TO PETS

The primary indication for gluten-free diets in people is to treat celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder occurring in genetically predisposed individuals that can be triggered by ingestion of gliadin, a component of the gluten found in wheat, barley, and rye. Celiac disease has not been diagnosed in dogs or cats.



Despite the fact celiac disease affects only 0.5-1% of the human population worldwide, gluten-free diets have become a human nutrition trend and are becoming increasingly popular for pets.

Key Messages

- The term gluten refers to the storage protein found in grains. A specific component of gluten is gliadin, which is present only in the gluten from wheat, barley, and rye.
- In people with celiac disease, gliadin from wheat, barley, or rye can trigger an immune reaction. Gluten-free diets are used to treat celiac disease and are now a nutrition trend having become increasingly popular with healthy people.
- Gliadin is not present in the gluten from other grains, e.g., rice, corn/maize, millet, or sorghum. Therefore, these grains are considered safe for those on “gluten-free” diets.
- Celiac disease, per se, has **not** been diagnosed in dogs or cats. However, pet food trends tend to follow human nutrition trends, and the popularity of gluten-free or grain-free commercial pet foods has grown.

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Key Messages (continued)

- A type of gluten sensitivity (gluten enteropathy) has been observed in a very small number of dogs, but no cats. The affected dogs were from one family line of Irish Setters and a group of Border Terriers. These dogs benefit from a gluten-free diet.
- There is no scientific evidence that gluten-free diets are better for healthy pets than other nutritionally complete and balanced diets.
- In commercial pet foods, as well as human foods, wheat gluten helps the food maintain its shape and provides texture.

Additional Resources

Verlinden, A., Hesta, A., Millet, S., & Janssens, G. P. J. (2006). Food allergy in dogs and cats: A review. *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*, 46, 259–273. doi: 10.1080/10408390591001117

Gaschen, F. P., & Merchant, S. R. (2011). Adverse food reactions in dogs and cats. *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, 41, 361–379. doi: 10.1016/j.cvsm.2011.02.005

Gujral, N., Freeman, H. J., & Thomson, A. B. R. (2012). Celiac disease: Prevalence, diagnosis, pathogenesis and treatment. *World Journal of Gastroenterology*, 18(42), 6036–6059. doi: 10.3748/wjg.v18.i42.6036

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