

# **To Feed or Not to Feed... Grains**

**The Flying Basset Organics  
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# To Feed or Not to Feed... Grains

**The following is a reprint from HEALTHY PETS -  
NATURALLY**

**by Russell Swift, DVM**

At the recent American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association Conference, I discovered that I am not the only one questioning the use of grains in commercial and home-prepared pet foods. Grains, such as oats, wheat, rice, barley, etc, are composed mostly of complex carbohydrates. They also contain some protein, fiber, B-vitamins and trace minerals.

However, they are NOT part of the natural diet of wild dogs and cats. In the true natural setting, grains hardly exist at all. Wild grains are much smaller than our hybridized domestic varieties. This means that even a mouse or other prey animal is not going to find much of its nutrition from grains. Therefore, the argument that "dogs and cats eat animals that have grains in their digestive tracts" doesn't hold up to scrutiny. Prey animals that live near farms or other "civilized" areas are likely to have access to grains. This is not a truly wild diet.

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## Grains

What other clues do we have that grains are not necessary for carnivores?

1) Dogs and cats do not have dietary requirements for complex carbohydrates.


2) Grains must be cooked or sprouted and thoroughly chewed to be digested. Carnivores do not chew much at all.

3) The other nutrients in grains are readily available from other dietary ingredients. For example, B-vitamins are found in organ meats and trace minerals come from bones and vegetables. (Unfortunately, modern farming has striped many trace minerals from produce and supplementation is usually best.)

Why have grains become so "ingrained" in pet feeding? To the best of my knowledge, grains were mainly introduced by the pet food industry. The high carbohydrate content provides CHEAP calories. In addition, grains assist in binding ingredients. We have become so used to feeding grains to dogs and cats that most of us get nervous when we decide not to use them. I know people who have been "grain-free" feeding and doing very well. My own cat is one example.

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What are the negative effects? I believe that carnivores cannot maintain long term production of the quantity of amylase enzyme necessary to properly digest and utilize the carbohydrates. In addition, the proteins in grains are less digestive than animal proteins. As a result, the immune system becomes irritated and weakened by the invasion of foreign, non-nutritive protein and carbohydrate particles. Allergies and other chronic immune problems may develop. The pet's pancreas will do its best to keep up with the demand for amylase. What does this pancreatic stress do over a long time? I don't know, but it cannot be good. I suspect that dental calculus may be another problem promoted by grain consumption.

Currently, I am making grains optional in my general feeding recipes. I am going "grainless" in more pets as I explore this area. I recommend trying to feed without grains if your pet is not improving on your current protocol

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The following is an excerpt from the 1996 revised edition of

### **REIGNING CATS & DOGS by Pat McKay**

For the past several months my own two dogs and two cats have been eating their fresh, raw food meals without grains, and I see a decided improvement in their overall healthy, especially, digestion and stools.

The interesting part is that they are eating considerably less in volume which more than makes up for the higher cost of meat and vegetables as compared to grain.

The reason I continued to search for another formula was because my cocker-mix had a chronic yeast infection (*Candida albicans*) which was exacerbated by grains containing gluten.

The problem improved 50 percent in the first few months and continues to improve by discontinuing the grains. She was not even able to tolerate rice, millet and legumes which are ordinarily acceptable.

Symptoms of *Candida albicans* are excessive scratching, licking, chronic eye and/or ear infections, rashes, hot spots, colitis, chronic cough, vaginitis, kidney and bladder infections, arthritis, hypothyroidism and even diabetes.



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Celiac disease is another intestinal disorder (although more rare) that is caused by the intolerance of some animals to gluten, a protein that is in barley, oats, rye and wheat. Malnutrition often accompanies this disorder because of the greatly reduced absorption of nutrients.

Symptoms of celiac disease include nausea, diarrhea, abdominal swelling, foul-smelling stools, weight loss, anemia and skin rashes.

All in all, I believe for most cats and dogs, grains should not be a regular part of their fresh, raw food program.



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