



STERN CARDIAC GENETICS LABORATORY  
 JOSHUA A. STERN, DVM, PHD, DACVIM (CARDIOLOGY)  
[sterngenetics@ucdavis.edu](mailto:sterngenetics@ucdavis.edu); August 9, 2018

## FREQUENTLY REQUESTED INFORMATION REGARDING TAURINE & DILATED CARDIOMYOPATHY IN GOLDEN RETRIEVERS

**Taurine reference ranges for Golden Retrievers:** The Stern Lab suggests that the following clinical reference ranges be used for Golden Retrievers and be considered for other known taurine-sensitive breeds such as Newfoundlands or American Cocker Spaniels. This is primarily based on 3 observations :

1. Golden Retrievers with marginal taurine levels (defined below) have been diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy and have documented disease reversal after taurine supplementation and diet change.
2. Previously published work documents taurine sensitivity in Golden Retrievers.
3. The most recently published reference on normal blood taurine values shows higher levels than previously reported.

- Normal whole blood taurine: >250nmol/mL
- Normal plasma taurine: >70nmol/mL
  
- Marginal whole blood taurine: 200-250nmol/mL
- Marginal plasma taurine: 60-70nmol/mL
  
- Low whole Blood taurine: <200nmol/mL
- Low plasma taurine: <60nmol/mL

### References:

- Kramer GA, Kittleson MD, Fox PR, Lewis J, Pion PD. Plasma taurine concentrations with normal dogs and in dogs with heart disease. *J Vet Intern Med* 1995;9:253-258.
- Belanger MC, Ouellet M, Queney G, Moreau M. Taurine-deficient dilated cardiomyopathy in a family of golden retrievers. *J Am Anim Hosp Assoc* 2005;41:284-291.
- Kittleson MD, Keene B, Pion PD, Loyer CG, MUST Study Investigators. Results of the multicenter spaniel trial (MUST): taurine- and carnitine-responsive dilated cardiomyopathy in American Cocker Spaniels with decreased plasma taurine concentration. *J Vet Intern Med* 1197;11:204-211.
- Backus RC, Choen G, Pion PD, Good KL, Rogers QR, Fascetti AJ. Taurine deficiency in Newfoundlands fed commercially available complete and balanced diets. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2003;223:1130-1136.
- Fascetti AJ, Reed JR, Rogers QR, Backus RC. Taurine deficiency in dogs with dilated cardiomyopathy: 12 cases (1997-2001). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2003;223:1137-1141.
- Freeman LM, Michel KE, Brown DJ, Kaplan PM, Stamoulis ME, Rosenthal SL, Keene BW, Rush JE. Idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy in Dalmatians: nine cases (1990-1995). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1996;209:1592-1596.
- Delaney SJ, Kass PH, Rogers QR, Fascetti AJ. Plasma and whole blood taurine in normal dogs of varying size fed commercially prepared food. *J Anim Physiol a Anim Nutr* 2003;87:236-244.

### Plasma vs. whole blood taurine testing:

If at all possible, we recommend that paired (plasma and whole blood) taurine samples be submitted for analysis. A low value on either or both tests is clinically relevant. If your dog is diagnosed with DCM, submitting paired taurine samples (plasma and whole blood) is imperative. We recommend that the UC Davis Amino Acid Laboratory be used for taurine testing, as this is where the literature utilized for our reference ranges was generated. <https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/labs/amino-acid-laboratory>. If a single test is submitted the Stern Lab recommends that whole blood be submitted preferentially. This is due to the false elevation of taurine levels that is possible in plasma samples due to sample handling issues. This is an area of some debate between clinicians and conflicting information on preference for plasma vs. whole blood exists. This underscores the value of paired sampling.

## **Clinical Recommendations for Golden Retrievers based on taurine levels:**

### If taurine levels test <200nmol/mL in whole blood or <60nmol/mL in plasma

- An echocardiogram by a board-certified veterinary cardiologist is indicated
- After echocardiogram has been completed, a diet change is recommended.
  - If DCM is diagnosed, this patient may need a variety of cardiac medications that would be prescribed by the attending cardiologist.
  - If DCM is diagnosed, prescribed supplementation with oral taurine and l-carnitine is recommended.
  - Reevaluation of taurine levels is warranted after three months of diet change and supplementation.
  - Cardiology reevaluation schedules will be recommended by the attending clinician pending echocardiographic findings.
  - Many Golden Retrievers with taurine-deficient DCM in our study showed slow and steady improvement over a period of 6-12 months.

### If taurine levels test 200 – 250nmol/mL in whole blood or 60-70nmol/mL in plasma

- An echocardiogram by a board-certified cardiologist is recommended.
- After echocardiogram has been completed, a diet change is recommended.
- We recognize that many dogs in this category may have normal echocardiograms and thus the value of screening should be carefully considered. If the dog is eating a diet that falls within the FDA warning or shares features with the diets identified in our study (see diets of concern section below), we encourage echocardiographic screening with greater enthusiasm.
- If an echocardiogram is not performed, a diet change is still recommended and a taurine level reevaluation after three months on the new diet should be considered.
- If DCM is diagnosed, this patient may need a variety of cardiac medications that would be prescribed by the attending cardiologist.
  - If DCM is diagnosed, prescribed supplementation with oral taurine and l-carnitine is recommended.
  - Reevaluation of taurine levels is warranted after three months of diet change and supplementation.
  - Cardiology reevaluation schedules will be recommended by the attending clinician pending echocardiographic findings.
  - Many Golden Retrievers with taurine-deficient DCM in our study showed slow and steady improvement over a period of 6-12 months.

### If taurine levels test >250nmol/mL in whole blood or >70nmol/mL in plasma

- Diet change is recommended if you are feeding a diet that falls within the FDA warning or shares features with the diets identified in our study (see diets of concern section below)
- If your pet shows any signs of cardiac disease (trouble breathing, exercise intolerance, fainting/collapse, coughing) we recommend your veterinarian evaluate your pet.

## **Diets of Concern & Choosing a diet**

The FDA alert called attention to several dietary ingredients that should be considered when evaluating whether your pet is at risk (for example legumes like peas and lentils, white or sweet potatoes). These findings were largely recapitulated in our current study of Golden Retrievers with low taurine levels and DCM. Our lab considers these ingredients to be of greatest concern when present within the first 5 listed ingredients on the dog food bag. Additionally, we noted a high percent of diets in our study were using protein sources other than chicken or beef and labeled as grain-free.

Points to consider when making a diet change:

- Choose a diet that does not contain the concerning components listed above
- Choose a diet that meets the WSAVA Global Nutrition Assessment Guidelines published as consensus by veterinary nutritionists from around the world:
  - <https://www.wsava.org/WSAVA/media/Arpita-and-Emma-editorial/Selecting-the-Best-Food-for-your-Pet.pdf>
- FDA alert found here:
  - <https://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/NewsEvents/CVMUpdates/ucm613305.htm>

## **Choosing a taurine or l-carnitine supplement:**

Selecting supplements should be performed based upon those that match their stated contents and are readily available for absorption. Luckily a previous publication tested multiple taurine and l-carnitine supplements. Based upon this publication our laboratory recommends the following supplements as those meeting our quality criteria. (Bragg et al. 2009 J Am Vet Med Assoc; 234(2))

### Tested taurine supplements that test within 5% of stated contents and if applicable disintegrated within 30 minutes

- Mega taurine caps by Twinlab (1000 capsule)
- Taurine by Swanson Health Products (500mg capsule)
- Taurine by NOW foods (500mg capsule)
- Taurine 500 by GNC (500mg tablet)

### Tested L-carnitine supplements that test within 5% of stated contents and if applicable disintegrated within 30 minutes

- L-carnitine 500 by Jarrow Formulas (500mg capsule)
- L-carnitine caps by Country Life (500mg capsule)
- Maxi L-carnitine by Solgar Vitamin and Herb (500mg tablet)
- L-carnitine by Puritan's Pride (500mg tablet)

The Stern lab does not recommend the empirical supplementation of taurine or l-carnitine to dogs without evidence of DCM and/or significant deficiency. If DCM is diagnosed we typically recommend dogs over 50lbs receive 1000mg of taurine every 12hrs and dogs under 50lbs receive 500mg of taurine every 12hours. We recommend L-carnitine at a dose of ~50mg/kg orally with food every 8hrs. Your veterinary cardiologist or family veterinarian should be consulted for prescribing the best dose for your dog.

## **Reporting to the FDA:**

Understanding the basis of this condition requires a great deal of research and investigation. Clients with affected dogs can contribute their data to help propel this research forward. You can report cases of taurine deficiency, dilated cardiomyopathy, sudden cardiac death, or any combination of these events to the FDA by following the information found here:

<https://www.fda.gov/animalveterinary/safetyhealth/reportaproblem/ucm182403.htm>

Additional questions or comments:  
[sterngenetics@ucdavis.edu](mailto:sterngenetics@ucdavis.edu)

This document last updated: Aug. 20, 2018