

## Vomiting in Dogs

### What is vomiting?

*Vomiting* describes the active expulsion of food from the stomach.

"It is not a specific disease or diagnosis itself."

It is a clinical sign that can occur with many diseases or problems; it is not a specific disease or diagnosis itself. Dogs vomit quite readily and occasional vomiting in an otherwise healthy dog may not indicate anything abnormal.

### How do I recognize vomiting?

Vomiting may begin with a stage of nausea, in which the dog appears restless, and possibly apprehensive. The dog may lick its lips, salivate and repeatedly swallow. Vomiting itself involves forceful contractions of the abdominal muscles, leading to expulsion of fluid, froth or food. The severe effort associated with vomiting may be distressing to the dog.

"It is important to differentiate vomiting from *regurgitation*."

It is important to differentiate vomiting from *regurgitation*, which is usually associated with problems affecting the esophagus and is a more passive process. Features that help to differentiate vomiting from regurgitation include:

- Vomiting typically involves abdominal contractions and effort
- Regurgitation typically occurs quickly without abdominal contractions
- Regurgitation often occurs right after eating or drinking

### How serious is vomiting in dogs?

It depends on the cause of the vomiting. Many cases of acute vomiting improve on their own without medical intervention (and without determining the cause within twenty-four hours). If the vomiting has not stopped within a day or two, medical attention should be sought to determine if the dog has a more serious disease, or if the vomiting has caused any metabolic disturbances. If one or more symptoms such as fever, lethargy, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, diarrhea or dehydration accompanies vomiting, or if the vomit contains blood, it is important to identify the underlying cause and provide effective treatment.

### What are some of the causes of vomiting?

Vomiting may be due to a minor intestinal upset, as can be caused by intestinal parasites or from "dietary indiscretion", or eating table scraps, garbage, spoiled food or foul-tasting things such as certain insects. However, vomiting can also be a symptom of more serious illnesses such as allergies, bacterial or viral infections, inflammatory conditions such as pancreatitis, intestinal obstruction from foreign bodies, organ dysfunction such as liver or kidney failure, or cancer.

**"Even when vomiting is caused a minor intestinal upset, it can lead to serious complications."**

Even when vomiting has caused a minor intestinal upset, it can lead to serious complications, including death, if treatment is not begun early enough to prevent severe fluid and nutrient losses.

### **What types of tests are performed to find the cause of vomiting?**

If your dog does not appear to be systemically ill (meaning the illness is not affecting more than one body system), the cause may not be serious. In this case, a minimum number of tests will be performed to rule out certain parasites or infections.

If vomiting is associated with several other clinical signs, your veterinarian will perform a series of tests to try and determine the exact cause of the illness. Diagnostic tests may include:

- Blood and urine tests
- Radiography (x-rays) with or without barium or contrast dye
- Ultrasonography
- Biopsies of the stomach and intestinal tract by endoscopic examination
- Exploratory abdominal surgery

Once the diagnosis is known, more specific treatment may include special medications, diets, or surgery.

### **How is vomiting treated?**

Specific treatment for underlying disease problems will depend on the diagnosis.

In cases where the cause is thought to be dietary indiscretion, your veterinarian may advise you to withhold food for a time ranging between six and forty-eight hours. After this time, you may be advised to feed your dog a bland, easily digested diet. A specific prescription diet may be prescribed, or your veterinarian may recommend feeding a mixture of boiled chicken and boiled rice, in small portions given frequently. It is important that your dog does not receive any other foods during this period. Water should be freely available and is important to prevent dehydration. If the dog is progressing well on this diet, the portion size can be gradually increased and the normal diet can be slowly reintroduced over several days.



**"This approach allows the body's healing mechanisms to correct the problem."**

Minor cases of vomiting may also be treated with drugs to control the motility of the intestinal tract or drugs that relieve inflammation in the intestinal tract. This approach allows the body's healing mechanisms to correct the problem. You should expect improvement within two to four days. If your dog does not improve within forty-eight hours of treatment, your veterinarian may make a change in medication or perform further tests to better understand the problem. It is important to keep in touch with your veterinary clinic so that your pet's condition can be managed properly.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM*

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