

Ingestion of Foreign Bodies in Dogs

Dogs are curious by nature. They love to investigate new sights, smells and tastes. Unfortunately, this curiosity can lead them into trouble. Dogs are notorious for swallowing paper, tissues, articles of clothing, sticks, wicker, bones, food wrappers, rocks, and other foreign objects. Many of these objects will pass through the intestinal tract without problem. It is common for dog owners to report finding all sorts of objects in their dog's stool or vomit.

However, one of the more common and potentially life-threatening conditions seen in veterinary practice is foreign body obstruction. Although most foreign bodies do pass uneventfully through the intestinal tract, if an obstruction occurs for some reason, surgical removal of the blocked object is the only treatment.

How do I know if my dog has eaten a foreign body?

Most pets that have ingested a foreign body will exhibit some of these clinical signs:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal tenderness or pain
- Decreased appetite or anorexia
- Straining to defecate or producing small amounts of feces
- Lethargy
- Changes in behavior such as biting or growling when picked up or handled around the abdomen

How is it diagnosed?

After obtaining a thorough medical history, your veterinarian will perform a careful physical examination. If a foreign body is suspected, abdominal radiographs (x-rays) will be performed. Several views or a series of specialized x-rays using contrast material (barium or other radiographic dye) will often be necessary. In addition, your veterinarian may recommend blood and urine tests to assess whether the patient's health has been compromised by the obstruction, or to rule-out other causes of vomiting such as pancreatitis, enteritis, infections or hormonal diseases such as Addison's disease.



How is an intestinal foreign body treated?

If a foreign body obstruction is diagnosed or suspected, exploratory surgery is generally recommended.

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Time is critical since an intestinal or stomach obstruction often compromises or "cuts off" the blood supply to these vital tissues. If the blood supply is interrupted for more than a few hours, these tissues may become *necrotic* or "die" and irreparable damage or shock may result.

In some instances, the foreign body may be able to pass on its own. In this event, your veterinarian may recommend hospitalization of your dog for close observation, and will perform follow-up radiographs to track the progress of the foreign object.

If any clinical signs are related to an underlying condition, or if diagnostic testing indicates compromised organ systems, these abnormalities will also require treatment.

What is the prognosis?

The prognosis is based on:

1. the location of the foreign body,
2. the duration of any obstruction,
3. the size, shape and characteristics of the foreign body, and
4. the health status of the pet before foreign body ingestion.

Your veterinarian will provide you with detailed diagnostic and treatment plans as well as an accurate prognosis based on your pet's condition.

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

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