

# Gastric Ulcers in Dogs

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The chances are good that at some time you have said, "I must have an ulcer" or, "That gives heartburn." So what is a gastric ulcer?

Gastro duodenal ulcers (stomach ulcers) are relatively common in humans, and potentially in dogs. Subjective symptoms are well recognized and stomach discomfort (heartburn) sends people reaching for antacids and stomach-acid blocking agents. Using special instruments called endoscopes, doctors can easily see the lining of a stomach and small intestine to confirm an ulcer.

While we tend to blame stress and anxiety for these ulcers, there is also an infectious component (*Helicobacter pylori*) to gastric ulcers in humans. Smoking and alcohol consumption can also play a role in people. In dogs, the primary culprit is Non Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDS). These drugs may be prescribed to treat inflammation or fever in your dog.

### How common are gastric ulcers in dogs?

The incidence of gastro-duodenal ulcers in dogs is not known. After all, animals cannot tell us they have heartburn. In addition, few of the inciting factors for humans play any role in dogs. What we do know is that because more and more animals are being administered NSAIDS, the incidence of ulcers is increasing.

### What is the cause of gastric ulcers in dogs?

Although organisms similar to *Helicobacter pylori* can be found in biopsies obtained from dogs, they do not appear to cause gastric ulcers. The use of NSAIDS is the primary cause. NSAIDS are sometimes used along with other drugs, such as corticosteroids, that increase the risk of gastric inflammation. Metabolic disease states, such as hyperadrenocorticism and liver diseases, may also increase the risk. Stomach cancer is yet another cause, but relatively uncommon in dogs.

## Symptoms of gastric ulcers in dogs

The clinical signs in dogs are similar to those of humans, but may manifest differently. Clinical signs noticed by pet parents may include:

- Anorexia
- Vomiting
- Melena (black, tarry stool)
- Pallor of mucus membranes
- Varying degrees of lethargy
- Weakness
- Collapse

## Diagnosis of gastric ulcers in dogs

These signs might raise a suspicion of significant inflammation but further confirmation is necessary to diagnose a gastric ulcer. While there are no diagnostic blood tests, blood tests should still be run to determine if other diseases are present. The only confirmatory ulcer test is to look directly at the lining of the stomach. Endoscopy is the least invasive method of visualizing an ulcer and confirming a diagnosis.

## Treatment of gastric ulcers in dogs

The primary method of treatment is removal of the causes. Discontinuation of NSAIDS and glucocorticoids is critical. Lowering levels of gastric acid is also important. Various H2 blocking agents may be used at the veterinarian's discretion. Coating and protecting agents like sucralfate may be administered to protect inflamed tissue and prevent further damage.

## Prevention of gastric ulcers in dogs

Most importantly, avoid unnecessary NSAIDS that may have an increased likelihood of causing ulcers. NSAIDS are primarily prescribed by your veterinarian to reduce inflammation, pain and fever. Be sure to ask your vet about the increased risk of an ulcer when your dog is prescribed this type of medication.

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*