

Understanding Vomiting in Dogs

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Gross title, I know, particularly for those of you not in a medical profession. It takes a strong stomach to read about [vomit](#), but I hope you can bear through it for the sake of your dog. It just may prove beneficial later.

"Normal" Versus "Abnormal" Vomiting

It's normal and reasonable for most dogs to vomit a few times a year. The cause may be a passing [virus](#) or ingestion of something that the gut deems "unagreeable." Unexplained vomiting that occurs more frequently, however, is abnormal and deserving of medical attention.

One would think that stepping out of bed barefoot into a puddle of yuck, or new white carpeting decorated with bile stains would initiate a veterinary visit anyway. Yet many people make the mistake of ignoring vomit as long as the animal appears normal otherwise. They justify the vomiting with excuses such as:

- "He eats too fast." Baloney! The normal [stomach](#) expands just fine whether dinner is consumed over seconds or hours.
- "He vomits because he eats grass." This is a classic 'chicken versus egg' conundrum. Do dogs vomit because they eat grass or do they eat grass because they feel the need to vomit? Some dogs are grazers. They enjoy munching on greenery and do so without vomiting. This I consider normal. What is abnormal are those dogs who, in response to their nausea or gut discomfort, develop a yen for eating grass, leaves, twigs, dirt, and whatever else Mother Nature is serving. [Click here to learn why dogs eat such strange things.](#)
- "Vomiting is normal in dogs." No, it is not!

Causes of Vomiting

Vomiting is a super non-specific symptom — I could list

at least a few dozen [diseases](#)/abnormalities capable of causing dogs to vomit. While it is always tempting to think something must be awry within the gastrointestinal tract (stomach and intestines) when vomiting occurs, one will frequently miss the diagnosis wearing such blinders. Abnormalities within the [liver](#), gall bladder, [kidneys](#), and pancreas can cause vomiting as the primary symptom. Vomiting can also be associated with some hormonal imbalances.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Vomiting in Dogs

The diagnosis of vomiting begins with you providing a thorough history for your veterinarian. Include details such as:

- Frequency
- Time of day
- Material found in the vomit
- Anything unusual that might have been ingested
- Normal diet
- All other symptoms observed

[Next comes a thorough physical examination.](#) This may be followed by blood and urine testing (to evaluate liver, kidneys, pancreas, etc.) and/or imaging studies such as [X-rays](#) and an ultrasound.

In some cases, biopsies from the gastrointestinal tract are needed to confirm a diagnosis. Biopsies can be obtained surgically or via endoscopy — a long telescope device that is nonsurgically passed into the bowel. (Those of you over the age of 50 know exactly what I'm talkin' about!)

If such testing is not feasible, empirical therapy (treatment without a clearcut diagnosis) such as [diet](#) change and/or medications will be an option. Compared to 20 years ago, veterinarians today have quite the arsenal of safe and effective antiemetics (drugs that prevent nausea and vomiting) at their fingertips. Medications to reduce stomach acid production are also commonly used when trying to resolve vomiting in dogs. All such therapies should be administered only by your veterinarian.

Questions for your veterinarian

- What can be done to determine why my dog is

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vomiting?

- Is there a particular diet you recommend for my dog?
- Should I alter the frequency of his meals?
- Can my dog have his usual treats and chew toys?
- What other symptoms should I be watching for?

If your dog has been vomiting more than a few times per year, pick up the phone and schedule a veterinary visit to figure out the cause. As with any medical malady, the sooner the problem is addressed, the better the outcome is likely to be.

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.