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## ***Why is my dog vomiting?***

Ron Hines DVM PhD

Vomiting – the most common cause is digestive system irritation – upset (dietary indiscretions).

When side effects from non-steroidal anti-inflammatory compounds or NSAIDs, medications like Rimadyl, Metacam and Previcox occur it usually present as vomiting.

The same effect is even more likely to occur if you give your dog medications designed for humans (like aspirin) - don't do that.

The most common cause vomiting are **dietary "indiscretions"** – dogs that found the leftovers of yesterday's supper **or get hold of anything they should not eat.**

**Anything that irritates your dog's stomach or produces nausea will cause your dog to vomit – just as people do.**

Dogs do have better developed vomit (emesis) reflex than we do.

Dogs, in particular, have a very easy vomit reflex – probably to protect them when they have eaten spoiled or contaminated or taboo foods.

**Vomiting, like fever, has a myriad of causes.**

Sometimes it is a rather straightforward project for your veterinarian to decide why you're dog vomited but it can also be quite difficult because dogs don't talk.

The most important factor determining if this is a minor problem or a sign of a more serious health issue are other signs that accompany vomiting.

**Things like;**

Frequency of the problem.

Weight loss.

Changes in energy level.

Change in bowel and bladder habits.

Evidence of pain and distress.

Veterinarians are always happy when owners actually bring in a sample of the material their dog barfed up.

Many owners can't bear to do this, but the material vomited is often the clearest clue as to the cause.

Sometimes, it is also easier for your veterinarian to distinguish between vomit and the mucus remnants of stool that accompanies colitis and diarrhea.

Aluminum foil, leaves, plants, grass, plastic rapping's, bone fragments, Christmas tree tinsel around the holidays, bits and pieces of favorite toys and swallowed fast food containers are high on the list of things found in vomit that ought not to be there.

Many of these items will later appear in the dog's stool.

Vomited material that is high in mucus or that could contains blood, usually indicate that the dog's stomach or high intestine is inflamed and ulcerated.

Undigested food can indicate tainted food, anxiety, or simply over eating.

Bile and mucus are often present when the source of irritation is in the upper small intestine (duodenum).

That is the area of the intestines where bile enters.

When that area of the intestine is inflamed, the direction of intestinal contractions are reversed (back toward the stomach) and vomiting is very common. (Reverse peristalsis).

That is the reason we occasionally see intestinal worms (roundworms) in vomit or stool.

When problems originate lower down the intestine, the blood is usually more digested (caramelized) and the odour of the material is more intense and suggestive of stool.

Another important clue to the area of inflammation is the length of time between the vomiting episode and the dog's last meal.

Vomiting is most rapid when it is the actual stomach lining that is inflamed.

Vomiting is most rapid when there is a blockages or inflammation of the esophagus.

When that occurs, the food is disgorged in sausage-like segments.

For the following – take the dog to the veterinarian immediately.

Vomiting accompanied by fever (or abnormally low body temperature), bloody diarrhea, weakness or respiratory distress is always an emergency situation.

Vomiting that continues throughout the day.

Repeat vomiting, also depletes the dog or pet's body of acid, causing metabolic alkalosis and depletes the dog's body's potassium stores.

When the dog also has diarrhea or cannot keep water down, they rapidly dehydrate.

All these events will lead to muscular weakness.

**Here are some of the common causes of vomiting.**

Associated with things eaten - dietary indiscretions.

The most common cause of vomiting in dogs is dietary indiscretions. It is amazing the things some dogs will eat when having the opportunity.

Many of these incidents are actually separation anxiety cases where a panicky dog eats everything in sight.

Placing these dog on a large dose of petrolatum-based cat laxative is often all that is required to slide this material out with the stool.

But these dogs need to be monitored continuously for seventy-two hours to be sure their intestines do not block or perforate.

At the first sign of abdominal distress, depression, general weakness, fever or blood in vomitus or stool, they should be taken to a veterinarian for further evaluation.

If you give any form of laxative to your dog, confine it to a room or place with a washable floor surface.

### **Vomiting and diet change.**

Changing a dog diet from one brand to another can causes a few days of diarrhea.

In a few cases dogs will vomit the new food as well.

This problem is worst when the change is to a diet of lower digestibility – like bargain priced house brands.

When it is from one reputable brand to another, the problem can usually be avoided by making the change gradually over a week or two.

### **Vomiting and eating too fast.**

Dogs that are not fed frequently enough or feel competition from other household may vomit undigested food soon after eating- especially dry commercial feeds.

Feed these dogs' smaller, more frequent meals and feed them in separate / in a dedicated feeding place.

### **Vomiting and intolerance to specific food items.**

Dogs love to beg at the dinner table.

The fact that you seem to relish a food item makes it an exciting anticipation for your dog.

Any human food, pastrami, pizza, devilled ham and the like get wolfed down fast – but often come back up just as fast.

When that happens, no harm is done.

Dogs get the same satisfaction from eating small as from eating large portions of anything.

If you cannot bear to stop feeding some able scraps, then feed them in much smaller portions.

Their pleasure is in the eating – not in the portion size.

### **Vomiting and food allergies.**

Food allergies are not so common in dogs.

When they do occur, they usually cause skin itching or diarrhea – not vomiting.

If your dog vomits after eating certain foods, it is more likely a food intolerance than a food allergy.

Food intolerances occur when the dog's digestive system is deficient in certain enzymes that are necessary to break down food ingredients.

Disorders of the stomach and small intestine.

Vomiting and obstructing objects.

Anything that blocks the exit of the stomach (pylorus) will eventually cause vomiting.

It never ceases to be amazed at the things that my dogs will casually munch and swallow – given the opportunity – most of the tennis balls, Christmas ornaments – fish pond ornament, coins, fishing gear, socks, acorns, rocks, stage props, loose change, jewelry, and bones of all sizes.

Dogs that pulverize bone generally end up with diarrhea, constipation or colitis problems.

It is the ones that swallow sharp fragments that concern me most.

Most of these bones dissolve rapidly in the dog's gastric acids without surgery – but a few penetrate the stomach or intestine causing vomiting and/or signs of peritonitis.

Peritonitis occurs when bacteria escape from the intestine. You can read more about peritonitis [here](#).

When dogs show signs of systemic illness (particularly weakness, fever or subnormal body temperature) that is related to swallowing something they shouldn't, it is a medical emergency.

Some of those objects can be retrieved with a gastroscopy, others require immediate surgery.

### **Vomiting and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)**

The two common signs of IBD are chronic diarrhea and vomiting.

You can read more about this problem in dogs [here](#) or in cats [here](#).

The cause is unknown, but is probably related to abnormal immune system function.

It is just as frustrating and difficult to control in dogs as it is in humans.

The two common signs of IBD are chronic diarrhea and vomiting.

It is not a curable condition but it can be controlled and managed.

All of the methods used to control IBD in humans are applicable to dogs as well.

### **Vomiting and parasites.**

Immature dogs that have large numbers of roundworms or hookworms may vomit.

Those puppies and young dogs often have large potbellies.

Hookworms cause vomiting by inflaming the lining of the small intestine but roundworms just block the intestine with their mechanical presence.

Owners often see long spaghetti-like roundworms in the material vomited up. (Hookworms are too small to see).

Both these parasites are quickly and safely eliminated with oral medications.

When roundworms or tapeworms are vomited, it is sometimes could a prelude or sign of a more serious problem than the parasites themselves.

**Vomiting and parvovirus infection** – sign in in young dogs.

And those young animals are quite likely to incidentally harbor some of these parasites as well.

You can read about parvovirus in dogs here.

**Vomiting and chronic gastritis.**

A few dogs vomit due to a chronically inflamed stomach.

**Two personality types are involved;**

The first group is the animal that regularly eats objectionable objects such as dirt, gravel, faeces, leaves bark and wood.

Sometimes this is a response to boredom, sometimes a way of dealing with anxiety, sometimes a response to a nutritional deficiency and sometimes no more than a quirky habit.

This condition is called Pica (*see article on pica on this website*)

When gastritis is due to anxiety, it can be part of separation anxiety complex.

These dogs need to be supervised closely.

The second group of dogs is high-strung and compulsive.

They are often underweight and a lot of them have dry hair coats.

They are also prone to bouts of diarrhea and do not tolerate changes in their diets or lifestyle well.

All these dogs do best on a very bland, monotonous diet.

During flare-ups, corticosteroid drugs (prednisone, prednisolone, budesonide) are quite helpful and some benefit from anti-anxiety medications like clomipramine.

### **Gastric dilatation-volvulus.**

Deep-chested breeds of dogs will occasionally have their stomach's flip over on itself, causing a kink at either end.

When this happens, the stomach quickly over inflates with gas and loses vital blood circulation.

These dogs repeatedly try to vomit but cannot.

They appear quite ill because circulation to the stomach is cut off and toxic products quickly accumulate in their blood stream.

This is a life and death emergency.

The dog will rapidly go into shock and becomes toxic if it is not treated.

Often, under light sedation, a tube can be passed into their stomach to temporarily relieve the bloat.

But the condition tends to reoccur if the stomach is not anchored in its correct position surgically.

You can read more about this problem [here](#).

### **Two other forms of knotting of the small intestine;**

Volvulus and intussuception also cause vomiting.

Volvulus is a spinning round of the intestine causing it to kink.

Intussusception is a folding in of the intestine upon itself.

In both cases food cannot pass the obstruction and blood circulation to that portion of the bowel is interrupted.

Toxic products quickly build up in the dog's blood stream – so both are an emergency situation requiring surgery.

Some people call this a strangulated intestine

### **Tumours of the stomach or intestines.**

In old debilitated dogs, vomiting can be a sign of tumours of the stomach or small intestine.

These tumours can be large fleshy masses that obstruct the passage of food or they can be subtle infiltrations of the walls of the stomach and intestine with cancerous cells.



It can be quite difficult to separate these infiltrative cancerous conditions from inflammatory conditions (ref).

Often a biopsy is required.

Large tumours can sometimes be felt by your veterinarian when the dog's abdomen is palpated.

Others can be seen on ultrasound examination or x-rays.

You can read more about cancer in pets [here](#).

### **Metabolic disorders.**

Kidney disease and uremia.

Failing kidneys cause toxic products to build up in the dog's blood stream.

This causes depression, nausea and vomiting as well as many other metabolic disturbances.

This build-up of metabolic wastes in your dog's blood stream is called uremia.

Earlier in uremia, dogs keep their body's toxic waste products level under control by drinking and urinating more frequently.

Although their kidneys have lost much of their ability to concentrate wastes in their urine, the large quantities of dilute urine they produce maintains their metabolic equilibrium.

But eventually excessive drinking is no longer enough and blood levels of urea and creatinine reach toxic levels.

At That point, vomiting is very common.

At this stage of kidney disease, ulcers may also form in your dog's digestive tract leading to vomiting and diarrhea.

Dogs with this problem are noticeably ill.

They have usually lost weight.

They are often dehydrated, anemic and listless.

Administering large quantities of intravenous fluids (diuresis) correct the situation for a while but eventually these dogs will pass away.

You can read more about uremia [here](#).

### **Liver disease.**

Liver disease is another common cause of vomiting.

Liver damage can occur as the result of eating poisonous and not good products or through bacterial or viral infection.

Tumours of the liver can also be responsible.

These pets are often jaundiced (yellow).

Stool specimens from these animals are sometimes abnormally light in colour or deep yellow.

Blood enzymes associated with liver damage are usually quite elevated.

These dogs may also show excessive thirst, weight loss, prolonged bleeding time and fluid build-up in their abdomens (ascities).

Many of these dogs respond to treatment and go on to live relatively normal lives and when they do vomiting ceases.

Some need long-term specialty bland diets to lessen the workload of the liver.

### **Heat stroke (Hyperthermia).**

These dogs are giddy and weak.

Their breath is rapid and shallow and they often vomit and produce diarrhea.

They are depressed.

They have rapid heart rates and may collapse or have seizures.

Their body temperatures can be as high as 42.5C.

Their core body temperature needs to be lowered as rapidly as possible in chilled water or with ice water applied by sponge.

### **Adrenal gland disease.**

Hypoadrenocorticism or Addison's disease is a condition in which the dog's two adrenal glands produce insufficient cortisone.

A common sign of this disease is vomiting and diarrhea – especially during times of stress.

The most common form of this disease is probably a form of autoimmunity in which the body destroys its own tissue.

Other signs of this disease are depression, diarrhea, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), low blood pressure, muscular weakness and an increase in white blood cells called lymphocytes.

Dogs may drink excessively. It is a disease with very vague symptoms, which is why it is frequently misdiagnosed.

The problems tends to wax and wane, appearing to be a digestive problem one time and a kidney problem another.

Dogs with the problem are usually between 4-8 years old.

No one breed is more susceptible to the disease than another, but about 70% of dogs with this problem are female.

You can read more about Addison's disease [here](#).

### **Other conditions.**

#### **Motion sickness.**

Many puppies or dogs vomit when they are first taken on car rides.

The best way to prevent this is to not feed them the morning before travel.

Rolling a car window down slightly to encourage a dog to look out also helps.

After a number of car rides the dog should do just fine traveling.

If not the same medication used to control motion sickness in people works well, dimenhydrinate (Dramamine)

#### **Pancreatitis.**

Sudden or chronic inflammation of the pancreas often causes frequent vomiting.

Dogs that develop this condition are usually middle-aged and often plump.

Sometimes the attack seems to have been brought on by a recent fatty meal.

You can read more about pancreatitis in dogs [here](#).

### **Middle and inner ear infections.**

Chronic ear infections that have migrated to the inner ear affect your dog's organs of balance and can cause nausea and vomiting.

A much more common sign, however, is head tilt to the affected side.

You can read more about ear infections in pets [here](#) and on the surgery that is used to correct the problem [here](#).

### **Physical disorders.**

Tear in the diaphragm.

Sometimes vomiting is the only sign of a tear in the diaphragm.

A disrupted diaphragm can be a congenital disease that the dog was born with or it can occur as the result of a car accident or fall injury.

Dogs with this problem sometimes vomit shortly after eating.

They vomit when the problem causes a portions of the stomach or small intestine become trapped in the tear.

Persistent right aortic arch (PRAS).

Causes dogs to begin to vomit about the time they are weaned to solid food.

You can read about one of those cases [here](#).

### **Megaesophagus.**

Also results in vomiting shortly after eating.

You can read about that problem [here](#) .