

Diarrhoea in dogs

Overview

Diarrhoea - soft, runny or liquid poo - is one of the most common reasons worried owners take their dogs to the vets. Diarrhoea is very common in dogs and mild cases usually get better within a couple of days.

Medical treatment is usually only necessary if a dog isn't getting better on their own, seems unwell or is showing signs of being in pain.

It is very rare for a dog with diarrhoea to need antibiotics as part of their treatment.

When to contact your vet

If diarrhoea is left for too long it can cause dehydration and lead to your dog becoming very poorly. Contact your vet if your dog has the following symptoms:

- Severe diarrhoea (if it's really watery or if there's a lot of it)
- Blood in their diarrhoea and/or mucus in their diarrhoea
- Diarrhoea on-and-off for 2 weeks or more
- Constant diarrhoea for more than 2-3 days
- Diarrhoea and other health issues
- They're taking other medications, especially anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- They are a young puppy or an elderly dog
- Sleeping more than usual
- Not eating or drinking normally
- Vomiting as well as having diarrhoea

- Painful stomach e.g. if they yelp when they are picked up or growl when you touch near their tummy or they are standing in a 'prayer position' with their front legs on the floor and hind legs stood up (see picture).



A dog sitting in the prayer position due to abdominal pain.

A mild stomach upset isn't usually anything serious but if you're worried it's always best to speak to your vet.

You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Causes of diarrhoea in dogs

The most common causes of diarrhoea are:

Food related:

- Eating something they shouldn't have
- Food allergy
- After a change in food

Gut infections:

- Viral gut infections - e.g. Parvovirus
- Worms
- Giardia
- Bacterial gut infections - e.g. Salmonella or Campylobacter

Other causes of diarrhoea:

- Haemorrhagic gastroenteritis (HGE)
- Colitis
- Gut blockage (foreign body)
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)
- Pancreatitis
- Liver disease
- Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency (EPI)

Home care for dogs with diarrhoea

Diarrhoea is a very common problem in dogs, fortunately it often passes within 1-2 days.

If your dog has diarrhoea (without blood or mucus) but is otherwise happy, well and behaving normally you could try to settle them at home. If they don't improve quickly or you are concerned about them at any point book an appointment with your vet.

Suggestions to settle your dog's stomach:

24 hours fasting

If your dog isn't old, very young or ill, fasting them for 24 hours can help to speed up their recovery.

A bland diet

An easy-to-digest diet can speed up recovery. Don't give your dog anything rich or fatty – this could make their diarrhoea much worse! Plain white rice or plain boiled chicken (without skin or bones) can be used in the very short term but bland diets are also available from your vet.

Smaller meals

Feed your dog very small meals throughout the day. This keeps their guts moving without overwhelming them.

Plenty of water

Dogs who are suffering from diarrhoea might need to drink a bit more than usual to replace the extra water they're losing in their poo. Make sure your dog has access to plenty of water and that they are drinking throughout the day. Speak to your vet if your dog stops drinking or is drinking much more than usual.

Rest

Let your dog rest and recover and avoid anything energetic until they are feeling better. If they are very lethargic then you should speak to your vet.

Probiotics

Probiotics are friendly bacteria for your dog's gut that can be beneficial for some dogs but not all. Probiotics are thought to work by topping up the normal bacteria and binding nasty bacteria and toxins. Probiotics can be found at your vets or online.

Gradually reintroduce their normal food

Your dog should be back to normal after a couple of days. Once they're passing solid poo you can start to reintroduce their normal diet slowly over a few days.

Will my dog need antibiotics?

It is very rare for a dog with diarrhoea to need antibiotics. There are a few specific causes of diarrhoea (e.g. Giardia) that sometimes require antibiotics but most cases have no need for them. They can even make the problem worse by wiping out normal gut bacteria.

Instead, your vet may suggest other treatment options such as probiotics.



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