

Constipation Prevention and Possible Complications in Dogs

As with any condition, prevention is the best medicine. If you are diligent in caring for your dog, the odds of health related issues are greatly decreased. This is also true in respect to constipation, and there are several things that you can do to help prevent this condition.

Three Simple Ways to Prevent Dog Constipation

1. Exercise

Dogs that have a sedentary lifestyle are much more likely to suffer from constipation. Exercise is important for overall health, and can be a large part of preventing your dog from becoming constipated. When your dog leads an active life, waste is able to move more freely through the bowels.

Exercise has also been proven to improve digestion, as well as promote thorough expulsion of waste. Exercising your dog is also a great way to bond with your pet.

2. High Fiber Diet

A very important preventive measure against constipation is being sure that your dog has an adequate supply of fiber in their diet. Fiber is a very important supplement for proper digestion, as it can absorb water and help your dog's stools be easier to pass. It can also help your dog to maintain a healthy weight, by preventing overeating.

However, too much fiber can cause diarrhea, as well as preventing in the absorption of some vitamins and minerals. A healthy dog should consume between 2.5-4.5% of their diet in fiber. More fiber can be added temporarily if your dog seems to be suffering from constipation, but this should be used short term.

3. Adequate Hydration

Although drinking an excess of water will not cure constipation, the cause of some cases of constipation is dehydration. This is because the colon absorbs a set amount of water before waste is processed in the intestines. If there is not enough water to supplement the colon, the stool becomes hard and dry.

Your dog will instinctively know how much water they require, so be sure to always have fresh water available. It's recommended to change your dog's water at least once per day.

Complications of Dog Constipation

If left untreated, constipation can develop into some very serious conditions. Without proper care, these conditions can result in severe sickness and death.

1. Obstipation

Obstipation refers to a severe case of constipation in which the blockage is so advanced that neither stools or gas are allowed to pass through the intestines. This is also called "intractable constipation", and often needs veterinary treatment.

2. Megacolon

This is an advanced constipation condition that occurs when the colon becomes abnormally dilated. The stools congeal into hard, dry masses inside the intestines, preventing any passage of materials.

Since it is almost always impossible for a dog to pass these excessively large fecal balls, surgery is usually required. Complications from surgery can arise, since it is difficult to properly heal the gut walls after incision. Recovery in a post-megacolon surgery can be lengthy, expensive, and painful for your dog.

Home Remedies and Treatments for Constipation in Dogs

Having a constipated dog can be a very unpleasant experience. Below are some of the treatment options available, both at a veterinary facility and for at-home care. However, if you have any doubts about which at-home treatments are best to give your dog, please call the office for advice.

At Home Treatments

Straining in a squatting position can be associated with diarrhea, or urinary problems, as well as diarrhea. Once you have identified that your dog is definitely suffering from constipation, there are many home remedies that you can try to alleviate this condition.

1. Pumpkin

Pumpkin has high fiber content, as well as containing a good amount of water. Feeding pumpkin to dogs is usually not difficult, since the taste appeals to their sense of smell. The amount necessary can greatly vary for individual dogs. Start with about 1 Tsp per 10 lb with each meal. After regularity is established, consider giving the pumpkin 1 - 2 times a week if your dog continues to have episodes of constipation.

2. Wet Canned Dog Food

This remedy works better if your dog has not yet started to refuse eating, as this could signify an advanced condition of constipation. Choose a high-quality, high-fiber canned dog food that has low grain content. This will make it much easier for your dog to digest, and may help to regulate your dog's bowel movements.

3. Fiber Supplements

The easiest way to increase your dog's fiber intake is to add additional fiber into their food, usually in the powdered form. A good source of fiber can be psyllium, an herbal fiber supplement. Unflavored Metamucil® or Benefiber® can be obtained at local grocery store. With a medium-sized dog, half of a teaspoon twice per day should be a good initial fiber dosage.

4. Olive Oil/Mineral Oil

Adding too much oil to your dog's diet can cause diarrhea, so be certain to use olive or mineral oil only if you are certain that your dog is suffering from constipation. With olive or mineral oil, mix it into your dog's regular food. About 1 tsp per 10 lb is a starting dose.

5. Herbal Remedies

There are many healing herbal remedies that can be safely used to treat constipation in your dog. The most commonly used herbal remedy for constipation is **Ginger**, usually in powdered form. Ginger is used to treat all sorts of digestive problems, and can help cure constipation by reducing muscle spasms that can worsen this condition. It also can reduce inflammation in the bowels, which can worsen your dog's constipation. Some dogs do not like the taste of ginger, so you may have to combine it with wet dog food or chicken broth. **Aloe Vera juice** can also help with constipation in your dog, though should only be used in small amounts, and be mixed with water or wet dog food.

6. Milk

This home remedy is subject to debate, because there is some uncertainty as to how well your dog's digestive system is able to process dairy products. However, in small doses, offering a bowl

of milk to your dog can help with mild constipation, as well as other digestive problems.

Veterinary Treatments

There are prescription medications that are specifically designed to treat constipation in dogs. However, in more severe cases (such as obstipation, which is constipation that is resistant to all forms of control), additional medical care will be required.

If your dog's constipation is persistent, we may recommend a work up including blood analysis and urinalysis (test which helps show the health of the kidneys). In very severe cases, hospitalization and possible surgery may be necessary. Constipation can become a very serious problem for your dog, so it is extremely important to catch it as early as possible.

Articles