

## Help for diarrhea

Your veterinarian will likely analyze a fecal sample, perform basic blood and urine tests and perhaps an abdominal X-ray or ultrasound to diagnose any medical condition. After your vet clears your dog from a medical condition, consider the following:

- ❖ **Diet.** Sudden changes in foods can upset your dog's intestinal bacterial flora, resulting in loose stools. Discuss your pet's current food and treat regimen to look for any problem ingredients. Changing the fat, fiber, protein and carbohydrate constituents can help many pets.
- ❖ **Probiotics.** Many pets suffering from diarrhea may benefit from adding species-specific probiotics to the diet. Ask your vet for an appropriate recommendation.
- ❖ **Stress.** Changes to routine, guests, travel or even weather can trigger loose stools. Evaluate if your dog has been more anxious or tense lately, and determine if there's a connection to any digestive changes.
- ❖ **Medications.** Many prescription medications can upset your canine's tummy. Don't overlook heartworm, flea and tick treatments. If your dog develops any problem with a prescription, alert your veterinarian and ask for alternatives.



Keep in mind that both constipation and diarrhea can cause blood in a dog's stool. Bright red blood without either diarrhea or hard, dry stools generally indicates the problem is closer to the rectum and anus.

### When to call your vet

In general, report any diarrhea or discolored stool to your veterinarian immediately. While most cases of diarrhea are relatively mild and self-limiting, there are serious causes, too. Bacterial, viral and fungal infections, intestinal parasites and many diseases all have loose stool as their early warning sign.

In addition, severe, watery diarrhea can quickly lead to life-threatening dehydration, especially in young, old and small dogs. Dehydration is a major concern in cases of doggie diarrhea because the feces rush through the large intestine, preventing normal water resorption. Failure to resorb water results in loose stools and risk of dehydration.

### When to treat at home

If your dog is otherwise healthy and behaving normally, ask your veterinarian if home therapy is OK. Here are my basic homecare instructions for mild doggie diarrhea:

- ▶ Withhold food — NOT water — for 12 consecutive hours.
- ▶ After 12 hours, if the diarrhea has improved, and there is no vomiting, lethargy or other changes, offer a small amount of a bland diet consisting of equal parts cooked, ground turkey and sweet potato or canned pumpkin every two to four hours.
- ▶ Consider adding ½ teaspoon slippery elm per 10 pounds of your dog's weight with each meal. This is an excellent herbal remedy used safely for centuries.
- ▶ If the diarrhea persists or returns, seek veterinary assistance immediately.

Many cases of diarrhea can be successfully treated at home with careful observation, a little preparation and plenty of patience. Always ask your vet for advice before treating any medical condition at home. 🐾



Dr. Ernie Ward is an internationally recognized veterinarian known for his innovations in general small-animal practice, long-term medication monitoring, special needs of senior dogs and cats and pet obesity. He has authored three books and has been a frequent guest on numerous TV programs.

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