

Disappearing Act

What it could mean if your dog is losing significant amounts of weight.

Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I have a mixed-breed female dog. She is 10 years old and has been spayed. She weighs about 25 to 30 pounds. We only feed her dry dog food. She has no fleas or ticks. Over the past two months she has lost about 15 pounds and has been drinking three times the amount of water as she normally does. She's normally active and doesn't seem to be in pain. Previous to the weight loss, she was sick and listless for two days. Now, she eats two cups of dog food daily, about a half cup more than normal. Before she lost all of this weight, eating over half a cup of food made her gain weight. Now, she's still losing weight. Does she have worms? I haven't noticed any in the stool.

A. It sounds like your dog may have diabetes. Diabetes mellitus causes weight loss and increased thirst, because the high levels of glucose (sugar) in the bloodstream end up leaving the body in the urine, pulling large volumes of water along with the lost calories. Left untreated, it will cause a slow, painful death due to dehydration and loss of brain function.

Another cause of severe weight loss, especially in an older dog, is cancer of any type. Please see a veterinarian as soon as possible. As far as dog food goes, most puppies are ready to switch to an adult diet at around 1 year of age. You can feed him in measured feedings twice a day.

There is no exact amount to feed, but start with what is recommended by the dog food manufacturer, then monitor your dog's body condition and weight. If he seems constantly hungry and a little on the lean side then by all means, feed him more. If he seems to be packing on extra weight, despite normal activity, then reduce the amount you feed. It's that simple, but as your dog grows older you may need to switch to a high-fiber food that allows your dog to eat more, but with fewer calories.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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