

Stop a Common Dog Killer

Intestinal blockages send thousands of dogs to the vet each year.

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When Spirit stopped eating and started vomiting last February, owner Kurt Glaub, of Oxford, Ohio, feared an intestinal blockage or prostatitis. The 10-year-old Labrador Retriever, with a tendency to eat socks, had a history of both. The thing was, Glaub says, I could account for every sock in the house.

X-rays showed something in Spirit's intestine, but the unidentified object was everywhere. Spirit couldn't even keep barium down for 30 minutes, making further exploratory X-rays impossible. Glaub and his vet opted for immediate surgery.

Lifesaving Intervention Good thing they did: Spirit's vet pulled an unrolled ace bandage from his intestine. This type of foreign body-long and stringlike-can catch at the top of your dog's intestine and cause it to accordion in on itself. Even with the best care, says University of Georgia's small-animal general surgeon Clarence Rawlings, DVM, this type of intestinal blockage causes death about 50 percent of the time.

Immediate care is crucial. This can be difficult as symptoms range from unmistakable (such as continuous vomiting and severe abdominal pain) to subtle (lack of appetite, lethargy, and occasional vomiting). In blockages of the lower intestine, vomit may appear brown or smell of fecal material; diarrhea may also occur. In cases of a complete blockage, your dog won't be able to defecate or even pass gas.

Prognosis Varies Since ingesting foreign objects-your dog eats something she shouldn't have-causes the most cases, traditional or laparoscopic surgery is often required. The prognosis is usually excellent and the recovery rapid. If the dog's intestine appears only partially blocked, the veterinarian may even recommend that your dog try to pass the blockage under close observation and with an IV drip to prevent dehydration.

Other causes of intestinal obstruction are quite rare, Rawlings says. Tumors of the gastrointestinal track are a possibility, as are hernias.