

Dog Digestive Problems

Discover what may be causing your dog's digestive problems.

Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 3-year-old Standard Poodle seems to have an overly sensitive digestive system. He gets fed a high quality natural dog food twice daily: dry and canned food with a little water or chicken stock or cooked with pork liver, and ground turkey or chicken on occasion. He's been to the vet four times with blockages and/or vomiting without blockage. He had a bloat problem at 2½ years old. He takes over-the-counter acid indigestion pills daily. The last time he went to the vet for vomiting there was no blockage, and it was cleared with a bland diet, but nothing showed up on the X-ray or the stool and blood sample. Do you have any ideas? When he feels fine he is an active, athletic, happy dog, and I'd like to keep him that way.

A. This sounds like an interesting case. I will give you, and your veterinarian, three possibilities to consider:

Some dogs with chronic or recurring vomiting, loss of appetite and diarrhea have inflammatory bowel disease. This occurs when the wall of the intestine is infiltrated with immune system cells that then interfere with digestion and absorption. It can only be diagnosed by taking a biopsy of the intestines, usually using an endoscope. However, in some cases, veterinarians will suggest a trial treatment of steroids to see if there is a positive response.

Another unusual condition that can cause vague GI (gastrointestinal) signs is Addison's disease. This is caused when the body's immune system attacks its own adrenal gland, causing a decrease in the production of some important hormones. Although a routine blood test can sometimes suggest Addison's disease, a specific stimulation test known as an ACTH stimulation test is required to confirm it. The treatment for Addison's is hormone-replacement therapy, including prednisone and a hormone that regulates sodium and potassium retention.

Partial or recurring bloat can occur in deep-chested dogs. This occurs when the stomach fills with gas or fluid and starts to twist on its axis. Unlike full-blown cases of gastric dilatation and volvulus (GDV), these dogs often look normal on X-rays because the stomach returns to normal by the time X-rays are taken. If your dog has not already had surgery, you might discuss having your dog's stomach sutured to the body wall (called a gastropexy) to prevent any future recurrences. Standard Poodles are one of the deep-chested breeds at risk for GDV or partial/recurring bloat.

Best,
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