

Dark Vomit Means Trouble for Dogs

Ulcers often cause dogs' vomit to be dark brown.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 7-year-old Golden Retriever has vomited a mucky, dark brown vomit six times. I removed his food and water for a bit at the start thinking that his stomach was upset and needed to calm down. I've now switched him to a soft diet not wanting to make his stomach work harder than it needs to.

He is acting normal, still wagging his tail and wanting to eat and drink, still looking for rubs and hugs. He is having bowel movements and is urinating OK. He is not showing any sign of pain or discomfort. He did have a large Denta bone, and true to my dog he had that gone in three minutes.

Is this a serious problem? The only thing I can think of is that somewhere along the line he may have swallowed a large pointed piece and something has either poked or cut his stomach.

A. The presence of dark brown coloration to your dog's vomit could range from an overdose of milk chocolate to invasive ulcers of the stomach wall.

Generally, when there is bleeding from ulcers in the stomach's wall or in the upper intestine, the vomit will be described as looking like coffee grounds. The final clue that would confirm the diagnosis of ulcers would be a black appearance to the stool. As blood from the ulcers passes down the intestines, it turns a tarry black color as it is digested.

If you are giving your dog any aspirin, ibuprofen, or any prescription medications for arthritis, I recommend stopping immediately. These NSAIDs – nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs – can cause severe stomach ulcers in some dogs, leading to internal bleeding, perforation of the stomach wall, abdominal infection, and possibly death.

Monitor the color of your dog's stool to help rule out bleeding ulcers. If your dog continues to vomit, dark brown or any other color, continue to fast him offering water only, and get into your vet as soon as possible.