



Cornell University  
College of Veterinary Medicine



# DOG Watch

Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine

Vol. 19, No. 3 ♦ March 2015

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It has no known advantages, and most have similar digestibility to grains.

## IN THE NEWS ...

### A Study of Food Labels Reveals Mystery Meat

Researchers at Chapman University in Orange, Calif., concerned about the potential for fraud in the globalized food supply and the safety of pets with food allergies, tested 52 dog and cat pet foods for the presence of meat species and their mislabeling.

They extracted DNA from the foods and discovered 31 were correctly labeled, 20 were potentially mislabeled, and one had a meat ingredient that could not be identified.

Of the 20 mislabeled products, 13 were dog food and seven were cat food. Sixteen of the 20 contained meat species that were not included on the label, with pork being the most common undeclared meat.

The report on the study, published in the journal *Food Control*, says it was unclear whether the mislabeling was accidental or intentional and at which point in the production chain it took place. In three of the cases of potential mislabeling, one or two meat species were substituted for another. ♦

## The Jury's Out on the Cancer Diet

*It may have the potential for prevention, but it's too soon to know if increased protein will benefit patients*

In the wake of research that suggests cancer cells have a sweet tooth, some veterinary nutritionists recommend high-protein, lower-carbohydrate diets as part of the treatment. The rallying cry for advocates of the so-called anti-cancer diet: Feed the patient; starve the cancer.

Dogs like protein so they tend to prefer protein-rich diets more than others. Protein also helps prevent lean body mass loss in cancer patients. "That is probably more important than anything," says nutritionist Joseph Wakshlag, DVM, Ph.D.,



Dogs seem to prefer meals rich in proteins.

Associate Professor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

**Lacking Research.** But as for the effect of the diet itself, it's too early to know for certain if a high-protein diet benefits dogs with cancer. Little research has been done on the topic. "Is there such a thing as an anti-cancer diet for a dog or a cat? I don't think we know yet," Dr. Wakshlag says. "There is some potential for what we'll say is 'cancer prevention.' I think there is some

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## Happy, Mad, Fearful, Aggressive?

*Emotion is evident in their body language from nose to tail if we learn to read and interpret the subtleties*

Dogs and humans have worked side by side for thousands of years, herding livestock, guarding farms and hunting game. More recently in evolutionary history, they have become emotionally connected companions. Today, surveys show many of the 56.7 million households in the U.S. consider their 70 to 80 million dogs to be bona fide members of the family.

Yet after all our time together, while dogs seem to have become adept at interpreting and anticipating our body language, we haven't developed that skill with them.

**At the Extremes.** Most people understand the extremes of canine body language and

behavior, such as growling, but they don't recognize subtle changes in posture or body-part movements of dogs.

"Everybody knows an aggressive dog or the very fearful dog," says behaviorist Katherine Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., professor emeritus at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "But they don't know the slightly anxious dog. Although we may have had dogs co-evolve with us for a long time, they haven't been house pets that long."

Failing to recognize canine body cues often leads to injuries for humans and dogs. Nearly 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs in the U.S. every year. According to Germain

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## SHORT TAKE

### Open-heart Surgery Restores a Dying Dog Back to Health

In the fall, author Dylan Raskin received heartbreaking news about his 8-year-old Japanese Chin. Esme had been been diagnosed with mitral valve disease earlier and now had only months to live. The condition, which causes the backflow of blood into the heart, left the dog breathless.

Today, Esme acts like the puppy he once was, thanks to open-heart surgery at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. The effort took research, expense of more than \$30,000 and a team of five Japanese veterinarians skilled in the procedure who came to the Cornell campus in Ithaca, N.Y.

Raskin sold his car, borrowed money and crowdsourced more at the website [gofundme.com](http://gofundme.com) — \$22,000 to bring in the specialists and \$10,000 in hospital fees. He found the veterinarians, and with the help of two Cornell alumnae, the college sponsored the rare seven-hour procedure. Taking Esme to Japan for the surgery would have required a six-month quarantine, which was too risky, given Esme was running out of time.

"There aren't any places that do this routinely — that's the biggest hurdle," says James A. Flanders, DVM, ACVS, associate professor of surgery at Cornell. "This Japanese team has been doing this surgery for the last 10 years and has a very high success rate."

Their connection to Esme's breed was only coincidence. "The name Japanese Chin is actually a misnomer, for the breed owes its basic origins not to Japan but to China," says the Japanese Chin Club of America.

A specialized team is needed for a bypass operation like Esme's: a surgeon, two assistant surgeons, a perfusionist to operate a heart-lung machine and an anesthesiologist. Veterinary surgeons in the U.S. have attempted the procedure, but it's especially difficult in small dogs, Dr. Flanders says. The size of a Japanese Chin's heart, for example, is no larger than a plum.

He explains the procedure's intricacies: "The surgery requires a bypass pump to temporarily assume the heart's function. The surgeons stop the heart from beating and



MICHAEL CARROLL/CORNELL

**A team of Japanese surgeons** repairs Esme's faulty mitral valve at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.



MICHAEL CARROLL/CORNELL

**Esme recovering** after his surgery.

clamp off the blood flow to and from the heart. While the heart is stopped, the bypass pump assumes the role of the heart, gently pushing oxygenated blood throughout the body through catheters the surgeons have placed in the major blood vessels.

"Once the valve repair is complete, the heart is allowed to start beating again, and the patient is slowly weaned off of the bypass pump as the heart regains normal function. Some of the biggest challenges come while the patient is weaned off the bypass pump. Fatal complications can occur, so the patients are monitored very carefully during this period."

After days in the ICU, Esme survived. "A miracle," Raskin says.

"Esme is much more active and his old self again," Dr. Flanders says. "His rapid and complete recovery exceeded my expectations. I was tremendously impressed by the skill and professionalism of the Japanese surgical team. It's wonderful to see a dog who was so severely affected by heart disease recover to levels he hasn't felt in years!" ♦

# No Avoiding it: They All Need Brushing

*Without it, nutrition, disease and allergies increase the likelihood of serious matting*

Does your dog have bad hair days? If his coat is long and fine, it's likely a frequent occurrence, says dermatologist William H. Miller, Jr., VMD, Medical Director of the Cornell University Hospital for Animals. "In addition to the nature of the coat, if grooming, nutrition and observation are suboptimal, the likelihood of matting also increases."

Other factors include skin or internal diseases that impact hair growth. "For example, dogs with itchy skin conditions such as allergies are more predisposed

to mats," Dr. Miller says. "Likewise, dietary deficiencies that render the coat dull, dry and lusterless can also increase the likelihood of matting."

**Humidity a Factor.** Although matting is rare to nonexistent in shorthaired dogs, all dogs need to be brushed, Dr. Miller says. And while shorthaired dogs can get away with occasional brushing, silky long-haired dogs require daily brushing. They include Bichon Frises, Lhasa Apsos, Pekingese, Poodles, Shih Tzus, Maltese, Pomeranians and Yorkies.

Environment is another factor. "The care most shelters give their dogs includes grooming, but it's not like having an owner with them 24/7," Dr. Miller says, adding, "It's probably a given that puppy mill dogs would be ripe for matting." Low humidity, which increases static electricity, and playing in water also render dogs more vulnerable to matting.

"Mats are obvious, both physically and tactilely," says Dr. Miller. "If the dog has itchy skin, the mats occur in the itchy areas. Otherwise, mats tend to occur in the lower regions of the body because as the dog lies down, the hairs are pushed together and rubbed around by bedding or carpets." Once a mat begins, it causes the surrounding hair to mat and can become self-perpetuating.

## WHEN MATS EQUAL CRUELTY

In December 2014, an SPCA investigator was called to a Buffalo, N.Y., home after police discovered a small dog who was so severely matted she could not move. It took veterinarians two-and-a-half hours to remove four pounds of matted hair from her. The dog's owners surrendered her to the SPCA and were charged with animal cruelty.



Bichon Frises like these adults are among silky-haired breeds that require daily brushing.

If left untreated, mats can cause skin irritation and uncomfortable pulling of the hair. When this happens, the dog may bite or scratch at his skin, tangling the hair even more. "If the underlying skin gets wet and can't dry easily due to the thick mat covering, skin disease may result," Dr. Miller says. Matted dogs can also be predisposed to hosting fly larvae.

**Home Treatment.** A matted dog is not a happy dog. Mats must be removed. "With small mats, home treatment is the way to go," Dr. Miller says. "The hairs can be teased apart. When mats are large, they may have to be cut apart with a dematting tool. Never use scissors. Since you can't see where the skin is, you can inadvertently hurt your dog. And waxing and chemical depilatories are definite no-nos!"

If your dog is seriously matted, it is best to trim his hair down to the skin with clippers, or enlist a professional groomer's help. "If your dog is grumpy, a trip to the veterinarian might be warranted, because the dog can be tranquilized and be de-matted there," Dr. Miller says. "This makes the procedure less stressful for both clipper and clippee."

The best advice for avoiding distress to your dog and a costly grooming tab is prevention. "Keep your dog in good health and groom him regularly, especially at shedding time," says Dr. Miller. "Grooming is crucial to preventing matting." ♦

## DIY DEMATTING: IT TAKES PATIENCE

You can make your own detangling spray by filling a spray bottle with water and adding a tablespoon of hair conditioner especially made for dogs. Shake it, spray directly onto the mat, and leave it on for a few minutes. Pet your dog and speak soothingly to set a relaxing tone.

Start with the outside of the mat, where the hair is less tangled, and work your way in with your hands, slowly picking apart the knots. Hold onto the base of the mat closest to the skin as you work to avoid pulling your dog's skin. If the mat is stubborn, follow up with a wide-toothed comb to slowly work the hairs free. Be patient. The process takes time.

Offer your dog small treats periodically to reward him for good behavior. Stop at the first sign of stress. Your dog's memory of an unpleasant grooming session can make future ones difficult. Several short sessions are preferable to one long one. Be sure to end with praise and treats.

**CANCER...** (continued from cover)

potential for maybe slowing cancer. But anti-cancer? Probably not."

The idea that carbohydrates may fuel cancer comes from a hypothesis from the 1930s after cancer cells grew faster in a laboratory dish when the cells were fed glucose, Dr. Wakshlag says. However, that was in a lab dish, not real life. More recently, a study published in 2000 in the journal *Cancer* evaluated two low-carb diets in dogs undergoing chemotherapy for Stage III — of five stages — of lymphoma.

Dogs who ate the low-carbohydrate diet that included fish oil and the amino acid arginine had longer survival times than those who ate a low-carb diet without the supplements. But it was a small study of 32 dogs, and it isn't clear what exactly accounted for the difference. Was it the arginine or the fish oil or the combination? Or something else entirely?

Few if any studies have tested low-carb diets for other types of cancer. Different cancers act differently, so the same diet is unlikely to work for all cancers. Dogs with breast cancer, for example, might benefit from a lower-fat diet.

"It's kind of like this black box," Dr. Wakshlag says. "We just don't know which cancers might respond a little bit and which ones won't." He recommends higher-protein, moderate-fat and moderate-carbohydrate diets for all cancers, but their ideal ratio hasn't been established for any cancer type.

**Carb Environment.** It would be easy to presume that a high-protein, low-carb diet "starves" cancer cells. But that would be a mistake. Even if a dog somehow never consumed carbohydrates, his body still would create glucose on its own — it does so by metabolizing protein. "I think there's a little bit of truth to the idea that cancers do grow when they're in what we'll call 'a carbohydrate environment,'" Dr. Wakshlag says.

**CORNELL ADVISES ON HOMEMADE DIETS AND SUPPLEMENTS FOR CANCER PATIENTS**

If you believe your dog needs a homemade diet, you can ask a nutritionist to develop one for you by contacting Cornell University Hospital for Animals at 607-253-3060. You can also go the hospital website at [www.vet.cornell.edu/hospital/Services/Companion/Nutrition](http://www.vet.cornell.edu/hospital/Services/Companion/Nutrition) to download a consultation form. The consultation fee is \$275.

"We do a lot of homemade diets for dogs with cancer," says nutritionist Joseph Wakshlag, DVM, at Cornell. Vigilant owners feel that using a home-prepared diet lets them know exactly what they're feeding their ill dog.

Some nutritionists can also answer questions about supplements for cancer patients, including antioxidants such as pomegranate, beta carotene, green tea extract and curcumin, a substance in turmeric. "Green tea has been shown to be toxic at very high doses in dogs and humans, while curcumin is poorly absorbed," Dr. Wakshlag says. Owners might also ask if their dogs should avoid supplements if they're undergoing chemotherapy, which many oncologists recommend.

The best advice is from your dog's oncologist, who likely will advise avoiding supplements because "there's no proven evidence that it works and at worst it hinders," Dr. Wakshlag says, though he himself is more noncommittal. "I don't wholly believe that those things are going to perturb your chemotherapy. I don't think there's a whole lot of evidence that that's true."

**CANCER RISK BY BREED**

Lymphomas — cancers usually originating in the lymph nodes but affecting any organ in the body — are one of the common cancers in dogs. It's estimated that one out of three dogs will develop the disease.

A new study in *Biomedical Reports* calls canine mammary cancer the most prevalent tumor in female dogs. In any case, cancer is particularly common among the following breeds, according to a study in the *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine* that reviewed causes of death for nearly 75,000 dogs from 1984 to 2004. In descending order, they are:

- ◆ Bernese Mountain Dog
- ◆ Golden Retriever
- ◆ Scottish Terrier
- ◆ Bouvier des Flandres
- ◆ Boxer
- ◆ Bullmastiff
- ◆ Irish Setter
- ◆ Airedale Terrier
- ◆ Gordon Setter

Bernese Mountain Dogs had the greatest incidence of cancer in a 20-year study of nearly 75,000 dogs.



BIGSTOCK

"However, your body, no matter what you eat, is still in a high-carb environment because you keep a certain amount of blood glucose in your tissues at all times. That glucose is in your blood, it's in your tissues and there's no way to really change that — and that's the problem. In the animal, it's almost impossible to do. In a culture dish, yes, there are all kinds of things we can do to make that happen."

In Dr. Wakshlag's lab, he and his colleagues tested whether lycopene — found in tomatoes — curbed canine osteosarcoma cell cultures. The result: "You may be able to slow the growth a little bit, at least in a culture dish," he says. Don't run out to a nutrition store to buy lycopene, though, because no one knows if it would actually work on dogs or if it did, the amount that would be needed. "The dosing is a huge issue."

**Conflicting Evidence.** In a different small experiment in his lab, researchers added presumed antioxidants to culture dishes containing osteosarcoma cells only to find mixed results — in some dishes, the "antioxidant" actually helped fuel the growth of cancer cells, while in other dishes, there was the expected inhibiting effect. The upshot: There is just so much conflicting evidence when it comes to cancer research. "It's really hard to deduce," Dr. Wakshlag says, "what's going to happen in each and every cancer."

What is known is that exercising and remaining lean throughout life seems — in general — to help stave off most types of cancers in people and dogs, Dr. Wakshlag says, and certain vegetables may help prevent or slow development of cancer, as well, judging by a study of Scottish Terriers.

Owners of 92 Scottish Terriers with transitional cell carcinoma of the urinary bladder and 83 Scottish Terriers with other conditions answered questionnaires about their pets' eating habits for the year before the diagnosis of the cancer or a comparable period for the control dogs.

Scottish Terriers who ate green leafy vegetables or yellow-orange vegetables (but not cruciferous) at least three times a week were found less at risk of developing the cancer, according to the study published in 2005 in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. Vitamin supplements didn't work nearly as well.

While much remains to be understood about nutrition's overall role in combating cancer, awareness of it is growing, Dr. Wakshlag says. "I think there's a lot of work to do and a lot we don't understand. Someday we'll get there, but it won't be in my lifetime." ♦

### BALANCING PROTEIN, FAT AND CARBS, AND CHOOSING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Whether the canine cancer patient's diet is commercial or homemade, nutritionist Joseph Wakshlag, DVM, Ph.D., at Cornell suggests these proportions of ingredients and does so in ranges because specific ratios haven't been established:

- ◆ **Protein:** greater than 25 percent of energy (calories).
- ◆ **Fat:** 40 to 50 percent, depending on how the patient's gastrointestinal system is responding to any treatments.
- ◆ **Carbohydrates:** the remaining calories.

Considering studies that included fruits and vegetables in the diet: "It does make you sit back and ponder the idea that their consumption can play a role in cancer prevention,"

Dr. Wakshlag says. "Although there are no 'magic' fruits and veggies, the traditional choices seem to be carrots, broccoli and kale for veggies. Apples, pears and pomegranate can be good choices for fruits."



**Studies indicate that broccoli, apples and carrots** are among the fruits and vegetables that may be effective in cancer prevention.

### NINE WARNING SIGNS OF CANCER

While the exact cause of each type of cancer in pets hasn't been established, the underlying problem is abnormal genes. They can cause uncontrolled growth of cells that invade surrounding tissues or spread to other areas, according to the Cornell University Hospital for Animals. It lists these warning signs that warrant veterinary attention:

1. Abnormal swellings that persist or continue to grow
2. Sores that do not heal
3. Weight loss
4. Loss of appetite
5. Bleeding or discharge from any body opening
6. Offensive odor
7. Difficulty eating or swallowing
8. Hesitation to exercise or loss of stamina
9. Persistent lameness or stiffness

## LANGUAGE... (continued from the cover)

Rivard, DVM, IPSAV, Ph.D., a former behavior resident at Cornell, in his experience the most commonly misinterpreted canine behavior is fearful posture, in which the dog's body is low and turned away, his ears are flattened and his tail hanging low, yet wagging.

Dogs use several methods for communicating with people, including olfactory and auditory communication, but by far, the most important is body language. Here are the key body parts to help you better understand your dog.

### The Eyes

**Looking sideways, showing the whites of the eyes:** The dog is stressed, possibly fearful. "You can see the whites of the dog's eyes when he is anxious because his eyes are open wider due to a spike in epinephrine," Dr. Houpt says. Avoid eye contact and turn your body to the side, which helps the dog feel less like you're approaching him in a threatening way. Speak calmly and encouragingly.



**Pricked ears?** They can have several meanings, depending on other parts of the body. When the ears are perked and forward, the dog is alert and aroused, with aggression a possibility.

### The Ears

**Flat on his head:** The dog is afraid. If approached, he could become aggressive, Dr. Houpt says.

**Forward-pointing ears, lolling tongue, tail loosely wagging:** This is an engaged, happy dog.

**Straight up:** Pricked ears can indicate several emotions, depending on other body parts. When the ears are perked and forward, the dog is alert and aroused, with the possibility of aggression, Dr. Rivard says.

**Standing up but relaxed and floppy:** a happy dog.

**Note:** While ears can be particularly expressive, some breeds have droopy ears while others have prick

ears, Dr. Houpt says. "It is much easier to tell with the prick-eared breeds if their ears are forward or back or flattened, whereas if they have floppy ears like many of the hounds, you just have to see that they pull them back so the ears have moved, but they are not as obvious."

### The Mouth

**"Smiling" and panting:** Some dogs exhibit a submissive grin, showing all their teeth with ears down, but this is idiosyncratic, Dr. Houpt says. "Some dogs do it; others don't. It's a slightly submissive greeting."

**Yawning:** It doesn't necessarily indicate drowsiness but can be a sign of anxiety. It's also been shown that dogs yawn to call a truce — the act is the opposite of fear and aggression, says psychologist Stanley Coren, Ph.D., known for his research on dog behavior.

**Panting:** Dogs pant to stay cool, so if it's hot, don't worry too much. However, if there's no physiological reason for it, panting is typically a sign of stress, Dr. Houpt says.

### Body Posture

**Relaxed:** "General relaxation of the body is an important cue," Dr. Houpt says. "If the dog is lying down with his hind legs sort of to the side, that is a relaxed posture."

**Lying down with the hind legs somewhat off to the side?** With the rest of the body relaxed, this is clearly a happy dog.



**An open mouth with the tongue showing and ears pointing forward?** The dog is attentive, calm and unlikely to bite. A wagging tail, however, doesn't always signal welcome.

**Sitting like a sphinx:** "If he's about to leap up, that is not necessarily a happy dog," Dr. Houpt says. However, it could also mean the dog is merely alert to his surroundings.

**Sitting upright, leaning forward:** Take caution, and notice other body cues at the same time, such as tail movement and vocalization. Coupled with a growl or bark, with a stiff, upright tail, this posture could indicate aggression, Dr. Houpt says. The dog is essentially making himself appear bigger, but depending on his personality, he might react differently when he's fearful. For example, he might lie on his back



When Germain Rivard, DVM, IPSAV, Ph.D., was a resident in animal behavior at Cornell, he had a consultation with the parents of a 10-year-old girl who had been bitten in the face by the family Labrador Retriever when she tried to hug him.

Her parents had come to Cornell's Animal Behavior Clinic because the girl didn't want her dog to be euthanized. The question was raised as a result of a dog-bite law in her community and the veterinarian's recommendation for an assessment of the dog at the clinic. "On the contrary, she wanted to play with him and love him even more," Dr. Rivard says.

That was the inspiration for a new direction. Dr. Rivard founded Animal Connected Inc., a Dog Bite Prevention Strategy app for iPhone, iPad and Android. The free app's purpose is to educate people, especially children, on how to recognize and interpret canine body language to prevent dog bites and attacks.

"I wanted to prevent dog bites on a larger scale, before they happen," Dr. Rivard says, citing a study reported in *Anthrozoos*, a *Journal of the Interactions of People and Animals* on people's ability to interpret dog body language. It found that, although adults aren't skilled at recognizing fear in dogs, children, particularly those between 4 and 6, are even less skilled.

"Adults seem to do better because they are paying more attention to more features of the dog's behavior, while the young kids focus on one or maybe two aspects of what the dog is doing, mostly watching the face," Dr. Rivard says.

The app's mission is to increase understanding of dogs' behavior and how to behave around them, while decreasing the number of dog bite victims. It uses 27 anatomic features of a three-dimensional dog in 14 body postures, using what Dr. Rivard calls the Ladder of Anxiety. A three-dimensional canine avatar named Bud presents the user with a combination of body language cues and tests on interpretation of those cues. They include:

- ◆ **Calm and unlikely to bite:** open mouth with tongue showing; looking attentive; ears pointing forward and floppy; body attentive and relaxed; possibly wagging tail.
- ◆ **Aroused and might bite:** mouth closed; looking attentive; ears point forward; tail is level and wagging.
- ◆ **Submissive and might bite:** mouth closed with lips lifted; whites of eyes show as the dog avoids eye contact; ears to the side and flat; body low and turned away; tail low and might be wagging.
- ◆ **Anxious and might bite:** mouth open with tongue showing; ears pointing forward; body bowing and leaping; tail up and wagging.
- ◆ **Anxious and about to bite:** mouth half closed with yawning or licking; whites of eyes are showing as the dog avoids eye contact; ears are back and flat; body is tense and crouched; tail is between legs and stiff.
- ◆ **Defensive aggression:** mouth open showing teeth and growling; whites of eyes show as the dog avoids eye contact; ears back and flat; body tense and crouched sideways; tail between legs and stiff.
- ◆ **Offensive aggression:** mouth open showing teeth and growling; staring at the person; ears pointing forward; body tense with rigid stance or lunging; tail level and stiff.



**More than 4.5 million people are bitten annually in the U.S.,** with children and dog owners themselves disproportionately impacted. See "The Most Likely Dog Bite Victims," September 2013.

in a misleading act of submission but then react negatively when petted.

"Panting, lifting of one paw, tail down — maybe not tucked between his legs but not up normally — are all other ways a dog is saying keep away from me," Dr. Houpt says.

## The Tail

**Perked and wagging:** This is one indication of a happy dog. In fact, Dr. Houpt says, "It wags toward the right in reaction to the owner and to the left other direction to a stranger." However, a tail slightly tucked or hanging low and wagging indicates fear, and this dog should be approached with caution.

Tail action is a tricky mood identifier and one of the more commonly misinterpreted body cues, Dr. Houpt says. "People get bitten because they think, 'Oh, I thought the dog was friendly because he was wagging his tail.' However, he was aroused; he was happily biting you!"

Owners who take extra steps, such as an obedience class, and read about canine behavior and body language will more easily begin to recognize and interpret their dog's needs, Dr. Houpt says. She recommends books by the late veterinary behaviorist Sophia Yin, DVM, as well as Dr. Yin's website [Drsophiayin.com](http://Drsophiayin.com) and Dog Bite Prevention Strategy, a free app by Animal Connected, created by Dr. Rivard. ♦



**Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D.**, here with her Cairn Terrier, Denver, provided the first answer on this page. Dr. Houpt is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus professor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

**Please Share Your Questions**  
We welcome questions of general interest on health, medicine and behavior. We regret however, that we cannot comment on specific products and prior diagnoses. Please send correspondence to:

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## COMING UP ...

MAMMARY  
TUMORS



IS ONE MORE  
TOO MANY?



CORNEAL  
ULCERS



DOOR DARTERS

## Her Havanese Finishes Eating and Keeps on Licking the Bowl

**Q** I have a 5-year-old neutered Havanese named Cowboy. He is healthy and at a good weight. I feed him a raw, frozen diet that he loves. He has a strange habit of continuing to lick his bowl long after all the food is gone.

I will sometimes give him a dried sweet potato chew or dried fish skin so he can have some chewing satisfaction, hoping he'll forget about his bowl, but he will still return to it and continue licking. This behavior lasts at least 15 minutes or more. Do you have an explanation for this behavior?

**A** The first thing that should be done for Cowboy is to take him to his veterinarian, where he should have a thorough gastrointestinal examination, including endoscopy in which the veterinarian can view the inside of the esophagus and stomach.

Three-quarters of the dogs who presented for abnormal or persistent licking problems to Diane Frank, DVM, a former behavior resident at Cornell and now the director of the Behavior Clinic at the University of Montreal's Veterinary Teaching Hospital, had gastrointestinal problems.

Among the disorders they discovered were delayed gastric emptying, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic pancreatitis, gastric foreign body and giardiasis. Be sure to take a video of his behavior to the clinic.

You did not say why he was being fed a raw, frozen diet. I assume you mean you bought it frozen and then thawed it for Cowboy; otherwise, he may be licking simply to warm his tongue. Raw diets may be more "natural" for dogs, but in fact when given a choice, dogs prefer cooked food. They also prefer canned meat to the same meat freshly cooked.

The preferences of dogs, or at least Beagles, for various meats, in order from most preferred to least, are preferred, are beef, pork, lamb, chicken and horsemeat.

Cowboy would probably be very happy on a commercial diet from one of the dog food companies that tests their products on real dogs. He might like a knucklebone to chew on, although licking and chewing are different behaviors.

A Kong with peanut butter or meat baby food or even peanut butter would give him licking time.

If his behavior persists, the licking could be an obsessive-compulsive problem. His veterinarian could prescribe medications, but be sure they do not mask a non-behavioral problem. Cowboy is lucky you are so concerned for his well-being.



**Cowboy should have a complete gastrointestinal exam** to rule out GI problems as the cause of his excessive licking.

## Is Grain Free Healthier?

**Q** A lot of pet food companies now advertise their products as grain free. Are these foods healthier for dogs? Are they easier to digest and do they help avoid food allergies? What are their advantages and disadvantages? I'm concerned because dogs' ancestors didn't eat grains.

**A** There are no known advantages of feeding a grain-free diet. Most use other carbohydrate sources like potato or peas. In human nutrition, gluten-free diets are needed due to gluten allergy and many grains contain glutens. This practice has infiltrated into the dog and cat food markets where gluten sensitivities are not as well recognized.

Grain free is not something to worry about unless your dog has had a diagnosis of a food allergy, and a food elimination diet, in which a specific food is eliminated for a period, may be appropriate. Most grains and non-grain sources have similar digestibility. Your dog's veterinarian should be able to help you if your pet has a food allergy that may involve grains. ❖

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