

THIS JUST IN

Generic Viagra for Megaesophagus

It relaxes smooth muscle

A generic form of Viagra (sildenafil) soon may be used to help dogs with megaesophagus, a condition that can result in aspiration pneumonia.

In megaesophagus, the muscles of the esophagus do not function normally, so food builds up in front of the stomach opening and can cause aspiration pneumonia and death. Dogs with this condition are managed with methods to help prevent regurgitation.

Sildenafil helps relax smooth muscle, so it is hoped the drug will act on the smooth muscle of the esophagus to allow food to pass into the stomach more easily and prevent buildup.

In a study at Washington State University, 10 dogs with megaesophagus received sildenafil or a placebo for two weeks, then had seven days without treatment, and ended with two weeks with the alternative therapy. The owners did not know which treatment their dogs received at which time.

The testing did not show a significant difference, but sildenafil did make the esophageal sphincter relax for 20 minutes to an hour. The dogs had less regurgitation while on the sildenafil and gained weight. While more research is required, sildenafil shows promise.

https://avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/ajvr/aop/ajvr.21.02.0030/ajvr.21.02.0030.xml?tab_body=fulltext

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Diet High in Protein, Fiber for Overweight Dogs	2
New Pain-Management Options Approved for Use ..	2
Look Deeply Into Anxious Dogs	4
Choosing a Doggie Daycare	5
Prime Time for Hot Spots	7
An Appetite for Poop	8

Get a Jump on Heart Murmurs

With an early diagnosis, you can fight heart disease

A heart murmur is an extra sound in a heartbeat, basically a whooshing noise your veterinarian hears when he listens to your dog's heart. A murmur can be mild and barely detectable or loud, possibly even strong enough that your veterinarian can feel it when he puts a hand on your dog's chest.

Heart murmurs are graded from 1 to 5, with 1 being mild and 5 being very loud and easily detected. They can lead to congestive heart failure, but that's largely dependent upon the dog's overall heart efficiency and how you handle the diagnosis and management.

It's important to understand that most heart murmurs are caught at wellness exams, once again stressing the importance of making and keeping those annual appointments.

What You Should Know:

- ▶ Early diagnosis is critical
- ▶ By the time symptoms appear, heart disease is likely
- ▶ Heart failure can develop
- ▶ Puppy murmurs usually disappear

What You Can Do:

- ▶ Monitor progression with echocardiograms and Pro-BNP
- ▶ Keep your dog at a healthy weight and exercise him
- ▶ Give medications, if prescribed
- ▶ Consider feeding a cardiac prescription diet

"Early diagnosis helps us intervene while there's still something we can do about it, whether it's a puppy with a congenital problem, or an older dog with a new murmur," says Erin Corrigan, DVM, Cornell class of '98, medical director, VCA Fairmount Animal Hospital, Syracuse, N.Y.

A dog's normal respiratory rate is 15 to 30 breaths per minute. Rates above 35 breaths per minute when a dog is relaxed or sleeping signify heart problems



The only breed with a known genetic link to mitral valve degeneration is the affectionate Cavalier King Charles Spaniel.

and warrant an immediate trip to the veterinarian. You can learn to take your dog's respiratory rate by watching his chest rise and fall, counting each rise for 15 seconds and then multiplying that by 4 for the number of breaths per minute.

Don't wait to start monitoring. By the time you see visible signs of a heart problem—difficulty breathing, rapid breathing, coughing, weakness, lethargy, exercise intolerance, and collapsing—your dog may have heart disease.

What Are Heart Murmurs?

There are two broad categories of heart murmurs in dogs:

A congenital murmur is present from birth. Congenital murmurs are usually caused by a structural heart defect. Fortunately, most murmurs in young puppies turn out to be benign in nature (see sidebar on p. 3). These are soft, quiet murmurs called "innocent" or "physiologic" murmurs, and most will be outgrown by 6 months of age.

An acquired murmur is one that

(continues on page 3)

Diet High in Protein, Fiber for Overweight Dogs

Dogs lost weight, lowered insulin and triglyceride levels

A study of overweight dogs fed a reduced calorie, high-protein, high-fiber diet for 24 weeks found that the dogs' body composition and inflammatory markers changed over time in ways that parallel the positive changes seen in humans on similar diets. The dogs achieved a healthier weight without losing too much muscle mass, and their serum triglycerides, insulin, and inflammatory markers all decreased with weight loss.

Reported in the *Journal of Animal Science*, the study is unusual in that it also measured changes in the dogs' fecal microbiota over the course of losing weight. Even though there are similarities in dog and human metabolism and digestive processes, dogs and humans differ in the species of microbes that inhabit the gut. These microbes perform similar functions, however. They metabolize proteins, carbohydrates, and other molecules that are derived from food but escape digestion by the host. They also break down fiber to produce short-chain fatty acids that are important in regulating glucose and appetite, reducing inflammation, bolstering the immune system, and providing energy to cells in the colon.

Dogs that lost weight also had increases in the proportion of bacteria of the genus *Allobaculum*. Higher *Allobaculum* populations correlated with an increase in fecal butyrate, a short-chain fatty acid that is a byproduct of the fermentation of dietary fiber. Previous studies have shown that butyrate has anti-inflammatory and anti-carcinogenic effects in the gut.

Total short-chain fatty acid concentrations did not change over time, however. This may reflect the fact that most of these organic acids are absorbed and not excreted, the researchers report.

Most studies of gut microbiota focus on humans, so the new research offers insight into the similarities and differences between dogs and humans, and how they respond to dietary changes and weight loss. ■

Phungvutwattikul, T., et al. "Weight Loss and High-Protein, High-Fiber Diet Consumption Impact Blood Metabolite Profiles, Body Composition, Voluntary Physical Activity, Fecal Microbiota, and Fecal Metabolites of Adult Dogs." *Journal of Animal Science*, 2021; DOI: 10.1093/jas/skab379. *Science Daily*.

New Pain-Management Options Approved for Use

More choices to increase your dog's comfort and aid healing

Mark Epstein, DVM, discussed new options for pain management in a recent seminar on "VetGirl," an online continuing-education service for veterinarians and veterinary technicians. Controlling pain can mean a faster recovery for your dog after surgery or an injury, and not all dogs respond similarly to various drugs. For example, after surgery, dogs should receive pain management for up to 72 hours post op, but getting medication into a pet who is already sore and uncomfortable can be difficult.

Nocita (Elanco) has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for limited use in dogs and cats. This is a local anesthetic whose effects are lengthened by a liposomal coating. For dogs, it is approved for use after cranial cruciate (a ligament in the knee) surgeries. Many veterinarians are using this off label for multiple procedures to provide pain relief for three days without owners having to medicate.

Synovetin OA (Exubriion) is a new product using electron beam radiation therapy to target macrophages and synoviocytes in a painful elbow, which is common in dogs. This requires an injection directly into the affected joint. Because the treatment utilizes a radioisotope there is radiation involved, and certain precautions must be taken. Most dogs can go home after a couple of days, but the family must agree to comply with the safety regulations until their dog is no longer a risk to them.

Resiniferatoxin (RTX) is a naturally occurring chemical found in the cactus-like plant *Euphorbia resinifera* that, when injected into the spinal column, interrupts pain transmission channels. It selectively destroys nerve cells associated with chronic pain. Currently, it has been used for dogs with osteosarcoma in pilot studies. It appears to have long-term effects (months to a year or more) with virtually no side effects. This would make it a valuable alternative for nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs), which come with several known side effects, like gastric ulcers. ■

Cornell DogWatch

EDITOR IN CHIEF

William H. Miller, VMD, Dipl ACVD,
Emeritus, Professor, Clinical Sciences

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Cynthia Foley

TECHNICAL EDITOR

Debra M. Eldredge, DVM

ADVISORY BOARD

James A. Flanders, DVM, Dipl ACVS, Emeritus,
Associate Professor, Clinical Sciences

Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., Dipl ACVB,
Emeritus, Professor of Behavior Medicine

Joseph Wakshlag, MS, DVM, Ph.D., Dipl ACVN,
Associate Professor, Clinical Nutrition

Kelly R. Hume, DVM, DACVIM
Associate Professor, Clinical Sciences,
Oncology

Meredith L. Miller, DVM, Dip ACVIM
Associate Clinical Professor, Small Animal Medicine

Leni K. Kaplan, MS, DVM
Senior Lecturer, Community Practice Service

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Eileen Fatcheric, DVM
Katherine Basedow, LVT

DogWatch is an independent newsletter
produced in collaboration with Cornell
University College of Veterinary Medicine



Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine

Cornell
Margaret and Richard Riney
Canine Health Center

For information on pet health, visit the Cornell
University College of Veterinary Medicine,
website at vet.cornell.edu

Send questions and letters to the editor:

DogWatch
535 Connecticut Ave.
Norwalk, CT 06854-1713
dogwatcheditor@cornell.edu

Subscriptions: \$39 per year (U.S.) • \$49 per
year (Canada). For subscription and customer
service information, visit

www.dogwatchnewsletter.com/cs
or write to: DogWatch, P.O. Box 8535,
Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535. 800-829-5574



DogWatch® (ISSN: 1098-2639) is
published monthly for \$39 per
year by Belvoir Media Group, LLC,
535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk,
CT 06854-1713. Robert Englander,
Chairman and CEO; Timothy H.
Cole, Chief Content Officer; Philip L.
Penny, Chief Operating Officer; Greg King, Chief
Marketing Officer; Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial
Officer; Tom Canfield, Chief Circulation Officer.
©2021 Belvoir Media Group, LLC.

Postmaster: Send address corrections to DogWatch,
P.O. Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535.

Express written permission is required to
reproduce, in any manner, the contents of this
issue, either in full or in part. For more information:
Permissions, DogWatch, 535 Connecticut Ave.,
Norwalk, Connecticut 06854-1713.

(Murmurs, continued from page 1)

becomes apparent later in life. Acquired murmurs are usually due to heart valve abnormalities or cardiac muscle disease. Fortunately, most dogs with acquired valvular disease never develop congestive heart failure with proper care.

Acquired murmurs usually involve one of the heart's valves. The most common cause is myxomatous mitral valve degeneration, which is a progressive degeneration of the mitral valve. The cause is unknown, but in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, a genetic link has been identified. Larger breeds also sometimes develop murmurs associated with cardiomyopathy, which is a term for cardiac muscle disease.

The mitral valve is the valve between the left atrium (upper chamber) and left ventricle (lower chamber) of the heart. Oxygenated blood from the lungs goes into the left atrium where it is transported to the left ventricle, which pushes the blood out to the rest of the body via the aorta. The mitral valve's job is to close after each heartbeat and stop the blood flowing back into the left atrium.

When the mitral valve degenerates, it becomes bumpy and irregular and no longer closes all the way, allowing blood to backwash into the left atrium. Over time, the left atrium will stretch and enlarge due to the increased volume of blood it's trying to manage. The heart becomes less efficient and must work harder with every beat. Eventually, fluid backs up into the lungs. When that happens, the dog is in congestive heart failure and will require cardiac medications for the rest of his life.

Monitoring Is Your Best Defense

If your veterinarian tells you he hears a heart murmur, he will likely recommend an echocardiogram to confirm the diagnosis and establish baseline cardiac function. Repeating the echo annually is a good way to monitor progression. An echocardiogram is non-invasive and usually done without anesthesia or a sedative. It is an important diagnostic test that will help your veterinarian manage your dog's heart health.

A simple blood test, called pro-BNP (precursor of B-type natriuretic peptide), is a useful tool for monitoring as well, as pro-BNP levels rise in the face of cardiac muscle stretch and stress.

It could be many years before your

dog's disease progresses to the point of needing cardiac medications, if ever. In the meantime, you can support your dog's long-term cardiac health by managing his weight. Obesity makes it harder to breathe, which strains the heart. It also makes it harder to exercise, and exercise is good for the heart.

Purina's new Pro Plan Veterinary Diet CardioCare is a prescription diet that is backed by research that showed the food slowed the progression of cardiac disease in its early stages. Hill's Prescription Diet Heart Care h/d and Royal Canin Veterinary Diet Early Cardiac are other solid options. These diets are sodium-restricted, which helps prevent fluid accumulation and supports healthy blood

pressure, both of which are important for cardiac patients. The nutrients include antioxidants, anti-inflammatories, and other things that support cardiac function.

If you are told your dog has a heart murmur, you should commit to regular follow-ups to monitor its progression, help your dog lose weight through proper diet and exercise, and consider using a prescription diet for canine cardiac health. Just initiating appropriate, targeted dietary intervention could add years to your dog's life. Your attention to cardiac management could be the difference between a dog who ends up in congestive heart failure and one that does not. ■

Murmurs in Puppies Usually Are Not a Concern

Most murmurs in puppies are benign, which means they aren't harmful. They are soft, quiet murmurs called "innocent" or "physiologic" murmurs, and most will be outgrown by 6 months of age. If your puppy does not outgrow his murmur, an echocardiogram is recommended to determine the cause, cardiac status, and prognosis. This is important whether your dog is intended for breeding or not. For dogs intended for breeding, the echo will help determine whether this dog ethically should be used for breeding. For dogs undergoing spay/neuter procedures, the echo provides your veterinary surgeon with important information regarding the risk of anesthesia. These are the most common congenital heart defects and the breeds most often affected by them:

- ▶ **Pulmonic Stenosis:** English Bulldog, Miniature Schnauzer, Mastiff, Samoyed, Beagle, Chihuahua, West Highland White Terrier, Keeshond, Labrador Retriever, Airedale, Boxer, Chow Chow, Newfoundland, Bassett Hound, spaniel breeds
- ▶ **Subaortic Stenosis:** Newfoundland, Golden Retriever, Rottweiler, German Shepherd Dog, Boxer, Bull Terrier, Samoyed, Great Dane, German Shorthaired Pointer, Mastiff, English Bulldog, Dogue de Bordeaux
- ▶ **Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA):** Poodle, Maltese, German Shepherd Dog, Collie, Pomeranian, Yorkie, English Springer Spaniel, Sheltie
- ▶ **Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD):** Akita, Bassett Hound, Bloodhound, Doberman, English Bulldog, English Springer Spaniel, French Bulldog, German Shepherd Dog, Keeshond, Lakeland Terrier, Old English Sheepdog, West Highland White Terrier
- ▶ **Tricuspid Valve Dysplasia:** Labrador Retriever, German Shepherd Dog, Great Dane, Weimaraner, Irish Setter, Boxer, Great Pyrenees, Dogue de Bordeaux, Old English Sheepdog
- ▶ **Mitral Valve Dysplasia:** Bull Terrier, Dalmatian, German Shepherd Dog, Golden Retriever, Great Dane, Mastiff, Newfoundland, Rottweiler

The prognosis depends on the congenital heart defect. Many puppies will live a normal lifespan. For other puppies, surgery may be an option.



Most puppies will outgrow a heart murmur.

Look Deeply Into Anxious Dogs

Anxiety in dogs is seldom a simple diagnosis

If your dog is nervous, and maybe even somewhat fearful at times, it's wise to look deeply into what may be causing these behavioral issues and then devise a plan to help your dog become more confident. An anxious dog is an unhappy dog. You can change that with consistency and predictability in your dog's life.

What Is Anxiety?

"In my experience, anxiety is used as a blanket description for anything that the dog does that the owner doesn't like," says Katherine Houpt, VMD, PhD, professor emeritus of behavior at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Houpt almost never diagnoses anxiety by itself, she says. Instead, there is usually something else at play, such as resource guarding or territorial



An anxious dog is unhappy and usually unsure of what's happening around him.

aggression, behind the dog's anxious behavior. Signs of anxiety can go unnoticed, says Dr. Houpt.

What You Should Do

You can do many things at home to help ease your dog's anxiety. "What seems to work best is predictability," says Dr. Houpt. "If dog does X, Y happens. It sounds simplistic, but it really seems to help dogs know what happens when." For example, simple things like teaching your dog to sit before she is petted or to offer a paw to be wiped off after a walk can give your dog a sense of control. She knows what comes next after being asked to perform that behavior.

Stick to a routine. Schedule out your dog's meals, walks, and play and training time so that she knows when these events happen. You can also make rest time part of your regular routine. For example, put your dog in her crate every night while the family eats dinner, then let her back out. Then if you have company over for a meal, she will already be used to going to her crate and will have a "safe spot" even if she is uncertain about the new people.

Have a plan for surprises. You also need a plan for when things don't go as expected. "Things like holidays and mailmen cause disruption," says Dr. Houpt. "Prepare a plan such as putting the dog in another room or something similar to get the dog out of the frightening situation."

Be sure your dog is crate-trained. Crates can be extremely useful for riding out events that are stressful for your dog. If she is used to spending some time in her crate each day for meals or rest periods, she will be comfortable going in there when something is going on in the house that is likely to upset her.

Have a safe getaway plan in place. If your dog is anxious about being approached by strangers or other dogs while out on walks, plan an evacuation strategy. Teach your dog to do a nose touch to your hand or come to your side on command, so that when you see a potentially scary situation brewing, you can give your dog the command and praise for a job well done to distract her as you adjust your route to avoid the oncoming stranger. Even something as simple as asking for a sit, then down, then sit again can give your dog something to do and take your dog's mind off the stressful event. Eventually, your dog will learn to look to you for direction when she sees a person or dog.

- These include:
- ▶ destructive behaviors
 - ▶ drooling
 - ▶ ears pulled down/back
 - ▶ excessive barking
 - ▶ licking lips
 - ▶ panting
 - ▶ shaking
 - ▶ whining
 - ▶ whites of the eyes showing

Behavioral Issues

At the root of anxiety in dogs can be behavior problems, including:

Separation anxiety. The dog shows signs of distress, such as whining, howling, barking, pacing, house soiling, or destroying household items, when the owner leaves the house. Dogs with separation anxiety often prefer to be in the same room as their owners and become stressed when the owner prepares to leave the house.

Resource guarding. The dog growls, postures, and might even threaten to or actually bite when another dog or a human tries to approach or grab something that the dog considers valuable. Resources that are typically guarded include food, treats, or toys, but dogs can also show resource guarding over a preferred resting spot or their favorite person. Resource guarding can be genetic or a learned behavior due to having to defend scarce resources from other dogs.

Territorial aggression. The dog lunges, growls, and/or snaps at people and dogs who come near his territory. This behavior is usually displayed along fence lines, through windows, and at doors. These dogs will often behave perfectly when visiting someone else's home or walking in an unfamiliar neighborhood, but they bark and lunge at anyone who comes near their house or walks down their street.

Sound sensitivity. The dog reacts fearfully to loud, high-pitched, or unusual sounds. Scary sounds can range from a dropped pan to a cell-phone beep to a running car or noisy truck passing by. Where most dogs might startle at an unexpected sound and then move on, a sound-sensitive dog does not recover from being startled and continues to show signs of fear and distress.

Cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS). The dog paces, pants, particularly at night, and is often restless and doesn't want to settle. She may seem disoriented. CDS usually affects senior dogs, a result of age-related changes in the brain.

Behavioral Modification

Behavioral modification is critical to managing anxiety, but the exact strategy depends on the cause of the anxiety and other behavioral issues that are present.

For example, if your dog shows resource guarding by preventing your other dogs from approaching you, you might start by keeping the dogs separate and giving each of them equal one-on-one time with you. Then over time, you can gradually start doing some activities with the dogs together.

If your dog has separation anxiety, you can gradually desensitize him to being left alone by first just walking out of the room and immediately coming back, then gradually increasing the time that you are out of sight.

Don't expect a quick fix. An experienced fear-free dog trainer who offers classes for you and your dog is an excellent place to start. Good dog trainers use positive reinforcement to encourage the desired behaviors. Avoid trainers who use harsh methods with punishment, like yelling, jerking leashes, pinch collars, shock collars, and so on. A trainer who offers a quick fix should give you pause.

Consider Medication

Anti-anxiety medications are a solid option for you "if you think the dog is suffering or if you are suffering—or if your relationship with the dog is suffering," says Dr. Houpt. In her experience, by the time most owners resort to seeing a behaviorist, their dogs need medication.

Some of the most common medications for anxiety in dogs include fluoxetine (Reconcil), clomipramine (Clomicalm), trazadone, and dexmedetomidine (Sileo).

Medications might just be needed while you work on behavioral modification strategies, or they may be beneficial for the rest of your dog's life. Rather than picking up an over-the-counter supplement or other remedy just to see if it works, invest in a visit with your veterinarian. With or without medications, develop a routine for your dog to give her a predictable, happy life. ■

Choosing a Doggie Daycare

Do your homework to avoid a horror story

Doggie daycare can be a godsend for owners of high-energy dogs who need an outlet during the day or for people who work long hours and can't let their pups out for bathroom breaks. It can also be the most horrible decision you ever made, ending with injured or lost pets. It's important to know how to properly evaluate doggie daycare and determine if it's a the right fit for your dog.

Not all doggie daycares are good, and the industry is not federally regulated. Local and state laws vary. A bill pending in Massachusetts, called "Ollie's Law," was written when Ollie, a 7-month-old puppy, was mauled to death in an unlicensed doggie daycare. Ollie's owner was determined that this would not happen to another dog and family in Massachusetts. We need more bills like that, but until then, we must exercise due diligence when choosing a doggie daycare.

Start your search by checking with your veterinarian, the Better Business Bureau, and online

ratings sources for complaints or signs of bad care (yes, you may need to take these reviews with a grain of salt but look anyway). When you talk to the daycare staff, find out if you can talk to other dog owners who have used their services and if you can tour the facility during business hours, so you can see how the dogs are handled and watched.



Signs of a good daycare: happy dogs of similar size, not too many out at once, attendant paying attention, toys, and shade for the dog who wants to avoid the sun.

Is My Dog a Good Fit?

The first thing to consider is whether your dog will be comfortable at doggie daycare. Some dogs love to wrestle and run with other dogs, but others would prefer to hang out with the humans.

Aggressive and overly fearful dogs aren't good fits for doggie daycare. The goal is for all the dogs to have a fun day and getting beat up or spending the whole day petrified is not going to cut it.

If your dog is fearful, especially of other dogs, talk to the daycare staff extensively about how they handle dog interactions and introductions. Experienced staff with a background in canine behavior may be comfortable working with your dog to slowly build his confidence so he can have a positive experience. But if the facility is more hands-off or appears to hire anyone who can scoop poop, it probably isn't the right place for an anxious dog.

Be honest about your dog's personality and any behavioral issues, such as if she doesn't want to be caught or touched. Talk to the daycare staff if you are unsure if it will be a good fit for your dog. If the staff know about any potential problems beforehand, they can advise you on whether your dog will become comfortable and, if they believe she will, a good facility staff will watch your dog a little more closely and prevent problems before they occur.

Types of Doggie Daycare

There are three basic types of doggie daycare: dog-park style, separate play areas, and in-home.

The dog-park style facilities have a large play area, usually outdoors or indoor-outdoor, and many dogs are loose together. There are often obstacles to climb on, pools outside in the summer, and some toys to share. This may be a good fit for outgoing dogs who love to run and wrestle. Be sure to find out if they separate dogs by size and temperament.

Daycares with separated play areas accommodate fewer dogs at once, but they should still match dogs with a similar size and play style together. Play areas may be indoors, outdoors, or both. This can be a good fit for dogs who are a little more particular about their playmates or get overwhelmed in a large group of dogs.

In-home doggie daycare is when a person takes dogs into their home. These are usually small groups, and the dogs typically have a normal household routine throughout the day. This can be a good fit for dogs who are shy about large groups of dogs or noisy environments. The downside, of course, is being sure they're licensed, insured, aren't accepting too many dogs, and have adequate number of trained staff members.

Some in-home doggie daycares are excellent, but you should be wary of daycare offered by one person in their home, as dogs could be neglected or escape with just one attendant. Ask what the plan is if the person watching the dogs becomes ill or unavailable.

A Word to Our Readers:

DogWatch Mailing List Policy

Like many other publishers, we make portions of our customer list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services we believe you may enjoy. Indeed, in all likelihood, we were able to first reach you only because another company graciously permitted us access to its customer list. If, when we make our list available, you do not wish to receive these offers and/or information, please let us know by contacting us at: DogWatch Opt-Out Program, PO Box 5656, Norwalk, CT 06856-5656. Please include your mailing label.

Things to Look For

Always ask to tour the facility, preferably during normal business hours. When you're there, check to see how the dogs interact with one another. Are they settled and calm or anxious? Check out the entire setup and look for:

Cleanliness. Poop and pee should be cleaned up promptly, and the place should not stink. It also shouldn't smell overwhelmingly of chemical cleaners or fragrances, as fumes are bad for dogs and people alike. The facility should have a regular cleaning and disinfection schedule and should use veterinary-grade cleaning products capable of killing viruses such as parvo and distemper, as well as the protozoa giardia, which causes diarrhea.

Secure fencing. Fences should be at least six feet high to deter most escape artists, difficult for a dog to climb, and secured without gaps anywhere, including at ground level, so no little guys can escape or get stuck in the fence attempting to escape.

Double-door entries. All access points to the outside world should have two doors or gates so that if a dog darts through the inner doorway, he is still contained. This might not be possible in a home, which is a concern. If that is the case, ask what the owner's security protocol is to make sure that daycare dogs aren't able to escape.

Free of hazards. Footing should be secure, not slippery, and there shouldn't be exposed cords or small openings that dogs can get caught on.

Temperature control. Indoor spaces should not be too hot or too cold.

Adequate staffing. Play groups should be supervised.

Find out what the daily routine is. Ask how long play sessions and rest periods are and where the dogs are kept while resting. Some facilities have kennel runs, while others put the dogs in crates.

It's All About Transparency

The most important thing about choosing a doggie daycare is transparency. The staff should be able to answer questions about their daily routines and protocols. If they become frustrated with your questions or won't answer, keep looking.

You're entrusting your family member to someone else, and you should be confident that your dog's needs and safety are priorities. It's simply too risky not to take precautions. ■

Questions to Ask

What is your staff to dog ratio?

Ideally, there should be one staff member for every five to seven dogs. If the ratio is worse than one to 10, keep looking. Watch the play groups to see if the ratio you are told matches what you see.

If dogs are out together, how is the decision made about which dogs and who makes that decision?

Little dogs can be easily harmed by larger dogs, and a pen stuffed full of too many dogs of any size is a recipe for a major fight.

What is your maximum occupancy, and how many dogs are here today?

If a daycare staff member can't tell you, that is a red flag.

What is your protocol for adding a new dog?

Ask how the staff integrates a new dog into the group, which might include having the dog crated next to some playmates at first, or a couple one-on-one greetings with other dogs before being letting him out with all the other dogs.

What training does the staff have?

All staff members should be trained in basic canine first aid and behavior. Certifications in animal care, training, or behavior are a huge bonus. Some facilities may seek out certification through the Professional Animal Care Certification Council (paccert.org), which is a good idea. Ask what type of background checks are done before an individual is hired.

How do you handle dog behavioral problems?

Ask how the staff de-escalates inappropriate interactions between dogs and how they break up fights. Find out how they handle things like a dog refusing to come inside, be caught, or growling at a staff member. Your dog should be safe and treated with kindness.

What is your emergency plan?

The facility should have an evacuation plan and protocols for staff and dogs in case of an emergency. You should also know their protocol for injuries. How is the dog handled? Do they call you first, care for the dog on-site, or take the dog to your vet or an emergency clinic?

Prime Time for a Hot Spot

Bugs, heat, and humidity promote its development

Hot spots thrive in humid weather. Throw in a wet coat from a swim, along with a flea or other allergy, and you have the perfect storm for this skin condition. The worst thing you can do when you see evidence of a hot spot is wait to see if it goes away. It won't.

It will fester, possibly becoming infected with bacteria or yeast, and drive your dog crazy, causing him to chew, lick, and chew some more.

What Are Hot Spots?

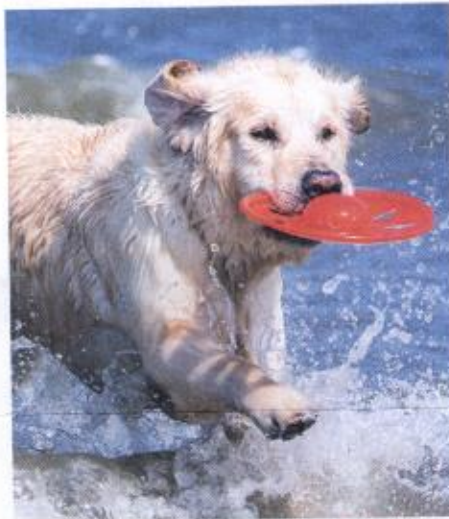
Technically, hot spots are patches of acute moist dermatitis created by the dog's licking, chewing, or scratching. These spots often appear near the tail, head, and hip areas, under dropped ears, and on your dog's limbs, where it is easy for him to lick and chew. The affected areas are painful, itchy, and expand as your dog continues to lick and chew at the spots. Eventually, secondary bacterial infections can lead to a pus-type discharge and a bad odor.

"Many skin issues with dogs are incorrectly called 'hot spots' when in fact they may be staph pyoderma, autoimmune disease, Malassezia dermatitis, etc. (bacterial infection, autoimmune disease, yeast overgrowth). Hot spots should be one to two lesions that are very localized, moist, and erythematous (raised, red, and wet in appearance). If a dog's lesions are not fitting that bill, then it could be something else, so definitely get it checked out by a veterinarian," says Julia Miller, DVM, assistant clinical professor of dermatology, Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Miller finds fleas and allergies to be the root cause for many hot spots. "I see a lot of ear infections resulting in hot spots on faces, and fleas or flea allergies causing hot spots on the back," she says.

Hot spots are commonly associated with dogs with a thick undercoat. If your dog goes swimming and never totally dries out, or has mats that hold moisture in, the conditions are ripe for a hot spot. Any dog with a thick coat who swims should be thoroughly dried after his outing. Hot spots are also a reason to stay on top of your grooming, removing any dead hair and undercoat.

When your dog swims, or after you



Dogs love water, but a thick wet coat that doesn't dry to the skin may develop a hot spot.

bathe him, dry his coat all the way down to the skin. Toweling will help, especially on a single-coated dog, but a dog with a heavy double coat will need a blow dryer. (Most dogs have a double coat, the outer layer and a thick under layer.)

Get an Evaluation

A hot spot that increases in size and/or does not respond quickly to home care will make your dog feel miserable. He needs a professional evaluation. Your veterinarian will start with a complete history and physical examination. She may feel the need to do some slide impressions of the affected areas to stain and look for yeast or bacterial infections, so she can determine the correct medication. She will look carefully for fleas and examine ears for infection or inflammation that might stimulate rubbing and scratching.

His anal glands will be checked and, emptied if they are full, as they can cause an itch/lick cycle leading to inflamed skin. A dog also may lick and chew at a painful area such as an arthritic joint.

Treatment

Treatment starts with clipping and cleaning the area. Dogs with large or painful hot spots may need sedation to do a proper job of trimming and cleaning.

A medicated powder or drying spray may be prescribed. If your dog is very itchy, oral steroids may be used to help

gain control over the inflammation in his skin and make him comfortable.

If the hot spot has been thriving for days or weeks, it may be infected and need oral antibiotics. Secondary staph infections are common in severe, longstanding hot spots. Your veterinarian may also find yeast infections such as *Malassezia*, which will require special oral or topical medications. Dogs with arthritis may need joint supplements and pain medications.

Hot spots happen. But gaining control of them quickly makes your dog more comfortable and reduces the need for veterinary intervention. Your best defense is regular grooming to prevent mats and a buildup of undercoat, followed by periodic checks after your dog has been swimming or bathed or was soaked in a rainstorm to ensure that his coat completely dries out thoroughly, down to the skin. ■

First-Aid for Hot Spots

For a weekend "quick fix" when your dog is going crazy chewing at a hot spot, try these steps to gain control until you can get the dog to your veterinarian:

- 1 These areas of inflamed skin can be quite painful so be prepared to muzzle your dog if need be.
- 2 Trim the hair around the hot spot. Any hair that is left may irritate the area more, causing more pain, and interfering with drying and healing.
- 3 Clean the area gently using a chlorhexidine solution.
- 4 Dry the area gently with clean, soft paper towels or a soft cloth.
- 5 Over-the-counter 1% hydrocortisone creams can help control the inflammation until you can get to the veterinarian.
- 6 If your dog continues to lick or chew at the area, use an Elizabethan collar/cone so he cannot reach the area.

These steps are temporary fixes for symptoms to get you through until the dog receives proper veterinary care. They do not address the cause of the hot spot and, unless you deal with the cause, the spot will return.

An Appetite for Poop

Dogs who eat poop can be trained to stop, but first rule out causes

Q I have two 3-year-old Doberman siblings, a neutered male and spayed female, and they eat poop. They know they shouldn't. They won't do it in front of us, but if they think they're out of our view, they do it. We've tried adding powder our veterinarian gave us to make the poop taste bad to them, but it did nothing.

My dogs live inside, sleep with me, have the best care and food, not too many treats, and do not eat people food or raw dog food. Mostly, they get quality canned food. They like fruits and vegetables. We backed off kibble because the female, Cayenne, can't have too much protein due to a kidney problem. No other dogs can get into our half-acre yard. What can I do to stop them from eating poop?



An immediate reward, followed by prompt clean up, can help break the poop-eating habit.

For many people, however, simply preventing all access with immediate clean up is simplest. Most dogs defecate on a regular schedule, so when he is likely to go, head out to the yard to pick up his poop right away before leaving him to play unattended.

Other options may work for some dogs. Changing the protein source in your dogs' food may help by changing the scent of the stool. There are also enzyme supplements and meat tenderizers that help to break down the protein in the food, decreasing what will pass in the stool. If your dog is on a diet or eating low-calorie food, increasing fiber intake can help him to feel full. Plain canned pumpkin is a generally safe option.

Most dogs seem to prefer fully formed stools, so feeding laxatives or stool softeners may make the stool less appealing. There are also some commercial supplements intended to make the poop taste bad, although, as you found out, they don't always work.

The excellent dog trainer Victoria Stillwell says that feeding the dog pineapple will stop coprophagia so you can try that, too, but I recommend the training. ■

A The bad news is that there is no cure for coprophagia, which is the fancy scientific name for poop-eating. It tends to be more common in females and may be related to keeping the nest clean. Remember that puppies cannot urinate or defecate by themselves for a few weeks after birth and the mother has to lick them to stimulate excretion and will ingest the feces to keep the den clean.

The good news is that if your dogs are ingesting their own feces, they won't catch anything from another dog or animals. Unfortunately, they will still have bad beath and maybe even dirty fur.

What can you do? You have already taught the dogs to avoid doing it in your presence, so you can likely expand on that training. Go out with them every time and, as soon as they have defecated, call them to you and give them a reward. You should be able to gradually lengthen the time between defecation and reward by standing right beside them and rewarding within seconds of evacuation for a week and then reward them for defecating when you are a yard away so they will have to move to you. The third week, increase the distance to two yards, etc. The idea is that after a month or so the dogs will run to the door right after they defecate so you can reward them and scoop the poop.

Health Concerns to Consider

Some medical conditions can cause dogs to eat feces. Poop is particularly attractive to dogs if it contains undigested food and/or if the dog has a large appetite. Stool will contain nutrients if the dog is not digesting his food properly, either due to gastrointestinal upset or a lack of digestive enzymes. Those nutrients, especially protein, make the stool smell appealing. Some diets may cause more nutrients to pass in the stool.

Your dog could also be extra hungry due to either problems with his diet or a health condition or medication causing increased appetite. Diseases that can cause an increased appetite include Cushing's disease, diabetes mellitus, and thyroid disease. Steroids such as prednisone have a reputation for increasing appetite.

The best place to start is with your veterinarian, who will likely do a fecal exam to check for intestinal parasites. Also tell your veterinarian what you feed your dog, how often he poops, and what the usual consistency of his stool is. This information combined with seeing the stool sample could indicate other potential issues. If your dog is only seeking out a particular dog's stool, it may be the other dog who needs to be evaluated.



Do You Have a Behavior Concern?

Send your behavior questions to Cornell's renowned behavior expert Katherine Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., shown here with Yuki, her West Highland White Terrier. Email to dogwatcheditor@cornell.edu or send by regular mail to DogWatch, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713.



Cornell
Margaret and Richard Riney
Canine Health Center

Coming Up ...

- ▶ *Should You Buy a Dog or Adopt One?*
- ▶ *Tricks to Get Your Senior Dog to Eat*
- ▶ *What You Need to Know About Seizures*
- ▶ *Ear Infections and Constant Scratching*
- ▶ *Parasitic Drug-Resistance Problems*