

© THIS JUST IN

Cannabis Poisonings

Rising in the USA, Canada

Cannabis legalization in North America has coincided with an increase in reports of cannabis-induced toxicosis in pets, but the magnitude of this problem, as well as outcomes of these incidents, remain unknown. Researchers examined the frequency, diagnostic criteria, clinical signs, and prognoses of cannabis toxicoses in pets in North America via an online survey of veterinarians in Canada and the United States.

Cannabis toxicosis was most commonly reported in dogs, and the number of cases increased significantly after October 2018. Frequently reported clinical signs of cannabis toxicosis included: urinary incontinence, disorientation, ataxia (lack of coordination), lethargy (lack of energy), hyperesthesia (skin sensitivity), and bradycardia (low heart rate).

Edibles were most commonly suspected to be the cause of toxicosis, usually ingested when the dog was unmonitored. Medicinal use of cannabis by pet-owners for pets is believed to be a contributing factor. Most pets recovered completely, although there were some deaths. ■

Amissh, R.Q., et al, "Prevalence and characteristics of cannabis-induced toxicoses in pets: Results from a survey of veterinarians in North America," PLOS One, April 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261909>

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When The Bee Stings

Dogs may have little reaction or need emergency care

Your dog is enjoying a quiet sniff when suddenly he yelps. You may not think much about it until you notice him pawing at his nose or holding up a paw. Sounds like bee sting. Most dogs do not show the severe reaction of anaphylactic shock that many people do, but a bee sting is painful and carries a risk of infection.

Bees leave a stinger behind, which has more venom in it. For this reason, if you can feel a stinger around the sting site, scrape it off with something stiff, like a credit card. Pulling it off can release more venom into the spot.

After locating the sting spot and removing any stinger, ice the area or put on a cold compress to help reduce inflammation and pain. If you have an antihistamine (diphenhydramine, aka Benadryl) and know the dose for your dog, you can give that. You can apply a paste of baking soda and water or aloe ointment on the spot after icing. If your dog has multiple stings, an oatmeal or aloe bath may help. With any luck, that is the end of this insect vs. canine confrontation.

For dogs who show a severe reaction, you may notice your dog looking slightly disoriented and having trouble breathing. He might drool, vomit, or have diarrhea. This is an emergency. You need to head to the nearest veterinary clinic immediately. If you know your dog reacts to bee stings, talk to your veterinarian about having an Epi Pen and how to use it properly.

Even a basically non-reactive dog may show troublesome signs if he gets a lot of stings. This can happen if he disturbs a hive or stumbles into a yellow jacket nest on the ground. In these cases, he is likely to get a lot of stings, which means more venom. Again, go to the veterinarian's office or an emergency veterinary site.

If you are walking where there are picnic remnants or rotting fruit on the ground, be very aware that bees may be on the food. Your dog is attracted to that food as well and if he grabs some or swallows it, he may get multiple stings inside his mouth. Swelling there can extend back and block his breathing. Yup. Emergency. Some dogs who get stings in their mouths may need to eat a slurry for a few days or even stay in the hospital for fluids if the swelling is severe.

Most bee sting cases clear up in 12 to 24 hours. During that time, your dog may want to itch, rub, or chew at the sting areas, which are usually red and often swollen. It is important to prevent your dog from going after those areas as he will exacerbate the swelling, irritation, and inflammation. ■

What You Can Do:

- ▶ Scrape off the stinger
- ▶ Immediately ice the area
- ▶ Consider Benadryl for reducing inflammation

It's An Emergency If:

- ▶ Your dog suffers multiple stings
- ▶ You notice your dog having trouble breathing
- ▶ Vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, and disorientation are red flags, too



Yes, curiosity got the dog stung.

Be Wary of Bacteria in Your Dog's Food Dishes

Study finds pet owners do not follow FDA recommendations

The next time you are washing dishes or filling the dishwasher, be sure to add your pet's food and water bowls. And this is true even if it appears that your pet licked the bowl "clean."

Many of the bacteria associated with unwashed food dishes have the potential to infect people as well as pets. Well known culprits include *E coli* and *Salmonella*.

A study out of North Carolina State University collected surveys from 417 dog owners and submitted 68 food dish swabs for bacterial growth. Owners whose dishes were swabbed were then put into three random groups: One to follow Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommendations for pet-food handling, one to follow human and pet food handling guidelines from FDA, and one group with no recommendations. Swabs were redone one week later. Following proper guidelines greatly reduced bacterial populations.

The surveys revealed that many people did not follow the FDA recommendations for handling pet food. From owner reports, 43% stored dog food within five feet of human food; only 34% washed their hands after feeding; and 33% prepared their dog food on human-food preparation surfaces (using the same countertop or cutting board, for example).

For human health safety (particularly if there are immunocompromised family members), the FDA recommends washing your hands before and after preparing pet foods and washing the pet dishes and food scoop with hot water and soap after every use. Many families in the survey reported only washing pet dishes occasionally. Some said they never did.

The FDA has guidelines for handling and storing pet foods safely. These recommendations include retaining the original packaging in case of any food recalls (lot numbers from the packaging are important for tracing where the product was manufactured), using containers that are deterrents to rodents and bugs (so you can put your bag of kibble inside a metal container for example), and (did we mention this?) washing the bowls, scoops, and your hands. ■

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0259478>

Bone Marrow Transplants for Lymphoma

This treatment is intense, but can be a good fit in some cases.

You've heard of bone marrow transplants for people, but can dogs get them too? The answer is yes. A bone marrow transplant is most appropriate for dogs with blood-based cancers such as lymphoma or leukemia. To undergo a bone marrow transplant, the dog must first receive chemotherapy to get into remission (no clinical signs of cancer).

Once the dog is in remission, additional chemo is done to clear remaining cancer cells from the bloodstream. The dog then receives a special medication that stimulates the release of stem cells from the bone marrow out into the bloodstream, where they can be collected with a special machine.

After the stem cells have been collected, the dog's entire body receives radiation. This process kills any cancer cells hiding in hard-to-access areas such as the brain, spinal cord, and bone marrow, but also kills rapidly dividing normal cells... like the bone marrow itself. A dog can't live without a functional bone marrow. As soon as the total body radiation is complete, the dog is given a transfusion of the stem cells that were collected earlier.

The dog is then kept in an isolation ward away from all other animals while the stem cells settle into the bone marrow and replace the killed cells. Usually after four days the dog's white blood cells have repopulated enough to allow for less strict isolation, but she may need to stay in the hospital for a week or two to protect from any risk of infection and address concerns immediately. Side effects include diarrhea and vomiting (ranging from mild to severe), as well as hair loss and, rarely, death.

Currently there are only two locations offering this treatment, North Carolina State University and Bellingham Veterinary in Washington state. ■

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Crate Training Difficulties

Overcoming the challenges of crating your dog

We all know that crate training your dog is important for his safety and his well-being in an emergency, but we hear so many stories of dogs who “cannot” be crate trained or seemingly stop accepting the crate. Pamela J. Perry, DVM, PhD, senior veterinary behavior resident at Cornell University Hospital for Animals, explains what can go wrong and how to work through it.

Whining and Crying

“Some dogs may whine or cry when crated, particularly at night,” says Dr. Perry. “Determine whether the dog is whining to be let out of the crate or to go outdoors to eliminate.”

Strategic bathroom breaks help with this. “Take the dog outside to eliminate before it is time for her to rest inside the crate,” says Dr. Perry. This can be challenging with puppies, who can get distracted by all the joys of playing in the yard and forget that they were out there for a reason.

Most dogs will sound different if they are whining for a reason versus just complaining a little. If your dog does a few soft whines right after being put in his crate, ignore him, and wait for him to settle. If the whining persists or sounds more urgent, he may need to go outside.

If your puppy has recently been outside, however, wait until the tantrum ebbs and then praise her for settling. Don’t let her out (that will teach her that screaming is a great way to get she wants) unless she is at risk of hurting herself.

Another trick for a dog who fusses in his crate is to make sure the crate is close to you. Placing the crate right next to your bed will make him feel more comfortable. You can even reach your hand down for him to sniff.

Resistance

If your dog resists going in her crate, you need to figure out why.

Even if you start crate training right away with your puppy and she takes to it well, there may come a point when she decides to test your resolve. If your previously crate-savvy puppy balks when asked to go in her crate and has a stubborn gleam in her eye, laugh at her sass but don’t back down. Gently but firmly guide her into the crate, praising when she is inside. The next several times you crate her, have some tasty treats on hand so you can remind your pup that going in her crate when asked goes well.

“Dogs also may develop an aversion to the crate if they have been forced into it or if the crate is used as a place of punishment,” says Dr. Perry.

To fix the aversion, build positive associations with the crate. If the location of the crate might be part of the problem, start by moving the crate to a different spot. Then review some basic crate training skills by tossing treats into the crate for her to get, celebrating every time she goes in when asked, and only shutting the door for a few seconds before releasing her.

If your handling might be to blame, set aside some time to do simple crate-training games to build your dog’s confidence. Your goal is to make the crate a happy place where she gets special treats and toys.

Crating in the Car

“Crate training a dog in the home will help with crate training in the car,” says Dr. Perry. Most dogs quickly figure out that a crate is a crate regardless of location, but some may struggle to generalize.

“Some dogs do better

What You Can Do

Make that crate an inviting, comfortable, safe place for your dog

- ▶ Cover the crate with a blanket
- ▶ Spray the crate with a dog appealing pheromone (Adaptil)
- ▶ Provide comfortable bedding
- ▶ Add a safe chew toy
- ▶ Locate the crate in a quiet area
- ▶ Leave the door open so that the dog can enter and exit at leisure
- ▶ Create positive associations with the crate by feeding the dog in it or leaving treats in there for her to find
- ▶ Darken the room and play classical music

with less visual stimulation, so covering the crate may be helpful,” says Dr. Perry. Other dogs do like being able to see their surroundings and may be more relaxed in a crate that is raised up so they can see out the windows. There is no real rhyme or reason to this, so it’s up to you to see what your dog prefers.

“Other dogs are happiest when they have a favorite chew toy to keep them entertained,” says Dr. Perry. “If the dog is still anxious in the car, then working with a veterinary behaviorist may be in order.” Excessive panting and drooling can indicate either motion sickness or anxiety, and there are different options to treat both.

Temporary Solutions

While most dogs pick up crate training readily, a few will take more time and patience to get to a point where they can calmly go in a crate when asked and settle there until you release them.

As you work on crate training, you still need ways to keep your dog secure when unsupervised.

One option is to put him in an exercise pen, which is basically a heavy-duty playpen. You can put one of these “ex-pens” anywhere in your house to give your dog more space than a crate but still prevent him from chewing anything while you are out. Ex-pens usually do not come with a top, but you can order either metal or fabric lids if needed.

Another option is to dog-proof one room that your dog can stay in safely when you are away. Some dogs do fine with the door closed, while others are more relaxed if they are confined by a baby gate so they can see out. You may need to experiment a bit. ■



Your dog should find his crate a comfortable, safe place.

Senior-Dog Dementia

Signs of mental dysfunction in your older dog begin to appear gradually, making it difficult to recognize

As dogs live longer due to advances in veterinary medicine and nutrition, we see more senior problems in dogs, and one of the most difficult to detect is dementia.

Most signs of cognitive difficulty have been building up. The earlier you catch the changes, the sooner you can start doing things to help your dog. You can't stop aging, but you might slow its progression and give your dog more quality time.

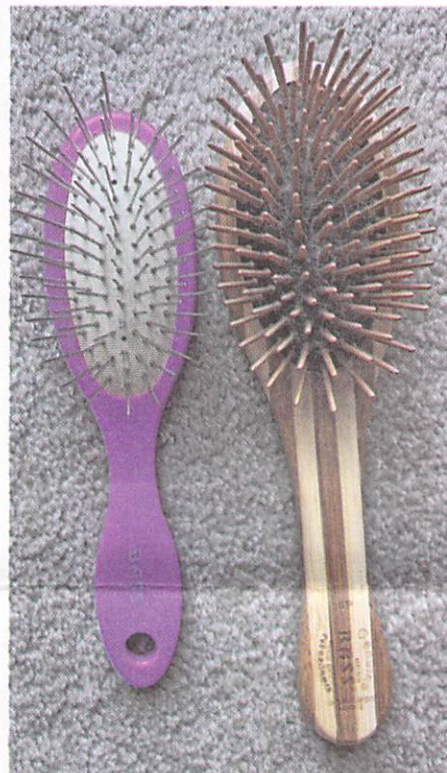
If you're not sure if you're seeing signs of dementia, Katherine Houpt, VMD, James Law Professor Emeritus,

of Behavior Medicine, at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine, suggests using the DISHAA assessment guide to help you track symptoms of declining mental capacity in your dog (see sidebar).

Managing the Signs

Start with simple management. Block off unsafe areas in the house, such as stairways where your dog could stumble and fall, and behind the couch, if she wanders behind that and can't figure out how to get back out.

Respect your dog's desire to mingle



A wood pin brush (right) is easier on an older dog (and on puppies) than the traditional steel pin brush (left).

Dementia Assessment Evaluation

A great place to start evaluating your dog for dementia is the DISH, or DISHAA, assessment. Basically, it gives you six areas to evaluate for your dog. Dr. Houpt recommends the DISHAA questionnaire developed by Gary Landsberg DVM to help owners determine if their dog has cognitive dysfunction syndrome (<https://tinyurl.com/DISHAADogWatch>).

For each letter/category, score your dog as 0=no signs, 1=mild signs, 2=moderate signs, 3=severe signs. A score of 4 to 15 is consistent with mild, 16 to 33 is moderate, and over 33 is severe cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS).

D: Disorientation. Dogs with these signs may get stuck in corners and not intuitively know how to back out or go around things. They may not recognize familiar people or animals. Often, they seem lost. **Score_____**

I: Interactions. Has your dog changed in how she acts towards people and pets in the family? She may suddenly ignore them, or she may react a bit aggressively, as if she does not know them. A formerly social butterfly dog may now simply go and hide when company comes over. **Score_____**

S: Sleep/wake cycles. This is often the first sign that families notice. Your senior dog is now up and walking around in the middle of the night. This disrupts everyone, especially if she gets stuck and then fusses for help. She may come and wake you up. The pacing keeps everyone in the house on edge. She may whine, bark, or even howl. No one is getting any rest (though your dog can sleep the next day away while you are at work). **Score_____**

H: House soiling. Your wonderfully house-trained dog is now leaving puddles, on her bed, on your bed, on the floor. Poop piles may show up unexpectedly as well, without her asking to go out like she normally would have. This is a major red flag for families. **Score_____**

A: Activity and Anxiety. Your dog may show less or more activity, pacing at night but unwilling to go on walks during the day. She may resist going to new places or meeting new people and act anxious in social situations. **Activity Score_____**
Anxiety Score_____

Total score_____. Bring your scoresheet to your veterinarian for a consultation.

with or avoid people and dogs. If she wants company, watch for signs of fatigue. If she prefers to opt out, have a room where she can rest. She might prefer her crate in that quiet room for even more security.

Pay attention to hearing loss. If your dog is asleep, speak as you approach and stamp your foot so that, if her hearing is going, she may feel the vibration in the floor and know you are near.

Many aging dogs develop the "midnight walks" habit that causes them to roam throughout the house at night. Add nightlights so she can see clearly where she is going and is less likely to get stuck. For some dogs, going for an extra walk right before bedtime can wear her out, leading to longer, deeper sleep. Melatonin helps some dogs, but there aren't a lot of studies to back up its effects. Discuss this with your veterinarian before using it.

House soiling due to dementia may be tricky to control. Start by taking your dog to the veterinarian to rule out bladder infections. If she's well, consider using "doggy diapers," which most dogs don't mind, but you will need to change them frequently and clean your dog as needed, so her hair does not smell or stay wet and cause skin sores.

Consider adding extra walks during the day, too, to give her more chances to eliminate. If your dog uses a canine litterbox or other indoor potty device, be sure she can get in and out easily. Put the box in a convenient location. If she has never used one before, this may not be an easy time to train her, but you can try.

Activities you can do with your dog will vary. Older dogs, and dogs in general, do better with a predictable routine, but enriching the older dogs' lives by training new tricks (you CAN teach an old dog new tricks), sniff walks (as opposed to exercise walks), and new food puzzles are helpful, says Dr. Houpt.

Routine Matters

Most senior dogs prefer a set routine for the "important things," like meals. So, if dinner is usually at 6 p.m., try to stick with the schedule. Some seniors fuss if dinner is even one minute late.

Keep daily walks on a schedule as well, as this will help with elimination problems. You can vary where you walk but try to keep times and distances about the same. Don't move dog beds or furniture. Keep food and water bowls in the same location.

Use low-level enrichment activities to spark up an oldster. Walk somewhere new, allowing plenty of time for sniffing. While many dogs may lose some vision and hearing with age, they seem to smell right up to the end, in most cases.

Some families think about adding a puppy or new dog when their senior shows signs of aging. There are older

dogs who perk up with a new addition, but some dogs are very unhappy about this situation. Try to arrange a temporary foster setup before making a permanent commitment to a new pet if you're considering this option.

For inclement days, simple food puzzles and tricks for special treats help. Snuffle mats engage dogs with some sniffing as well as eating. Remember to gear the tricks to your dog's physical capabilities. She may not be able to "sit pretty," but teaching her to shake with a paw or hit a button on the floor could be within her reach.

Scent-work games appeal to many older dogs. They love using their noses and the immediate rewards keep them in the game. You can do simple hides in your house or yard for her.

Schedule physicals and checkups at least every six months at your veterinary clinic, while doing monthly, or even weekly, exams at home.

Make sure your senior dog has identification on her at all times. At a minimum, be sure your microchip information is correct and her collar has the right phone number on it. If she should manage to get out of your house or yard, she may not be able to find her way home.

Rethink and adjust your grooming routine. A wooden pin brush is appreciated by older longhair dogs. Consider doing a hygiene shave of long hair around the rectum and vulva. Keep nails and hair on the feet trimmed to help with walking.

Vestibular Syndrome

Vestibular syndrome is often confused with cognitive dysfunction syndrome. Vestibular is a sudden-onset balance issue. Without warning, your dog can't stand or stands but walks in circles and with her head tilted. She acts nauseated when you try to feed her and has trouble eating and drinking. When you look at her eyes they move in a rapid, repetitive way, sideways, up and down, or circular. This is called nystagmus. There is no discernible cause for any of the symptoms.

The signs gradually improve after the first day or so, in most cases. The head tilt may remain, but dogs adapt to that well. Most dogs return to normal, but it may take weeks in some cases.

There is no established treatment for vestibular, but your veterinarian may need to prescribe medications to help your dog resume eating and/or fluids for hydration. A support harness can help your dog walk and handle obstacles like stairs. You can also use a towel around her "waist" to support her. It is important to keep your dog up and moving to prevent pressure sores. When she is lying down, she needs a well-padded bed.

You may want to switch to a diet specifically for senior dogs battling cognitive dysfunction. Your veterinarian can advise you on the best one to try for your dog and about the option of adding antioxidants, omega 3 fatty acids, or medium-chain triglycerides to your dog's diet. While there are few studies about the use of these supplements in senior dogs, they are largely considered safe, and anecdotal evidence is accumulating.

Your veterinarian may suggest the prescription medication selegiline (Anipryl). Selegiline works to protect nerve cells and enhances dopamine in the brain. Some owners may notice improvement in three weeks or less, but many dogs take six weeks before changes are noted. Many owners have said it helps with sundowner syndrome (worsening symptoms and irritability that occurs at night) and nightwalking symptoms. Acupuncture and laser treatment as well as other rehab protocols like an underwater treadmill or a pool to swim may help to keep your senior active. ■



Senior dogs can easily get lost if they "escape" home or find themselves off leash.

Gabapentin: The Great Add-On

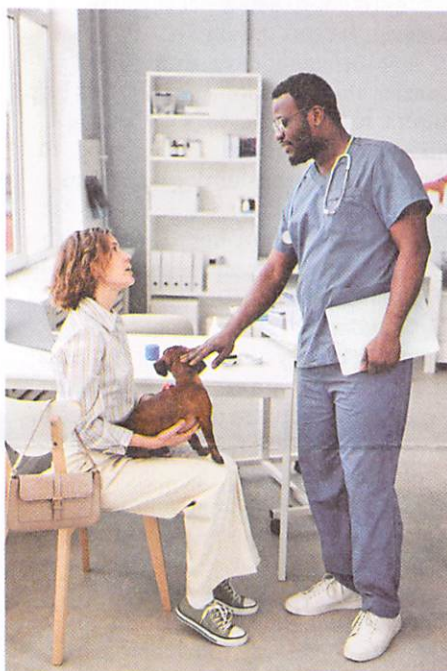
Its popularity to help with pain and anxiety is rising

Gabapentin is a prescription medication that has gained popularity in veterinary medicine in recent years for its significant contribution to both pain and anxiety management. This drug is making strides in gaining control of long-term pain issues, improving quality of life.

Gabapentin is best known for its ability to manage a particular type of pain called neuropathic pain. Neuropathic pain arises from damaged nerves. Examples of neuropathic pain include neck and back pain, bulging discs, pinched nerves, tumors affecting a nerve or pressing on a nerve, some cancers, and dental pain. Gabapentin, technically an anticonvulsant medication, blocks the transmission of signals in the central nervous system that trigger seizures. Some of those same transmitters are also active in pain perception, which is why gabapentin can reduce your dog's pain.

This is different from the pain felt from damaged tissue, like when you smash your thumb with a hammer. This type of pain is transmitted from the damage site along healthy nerves to the brain and resolves over time.

Chronic pain is not expected to resolve and must be managed for the remainder of the pet's life. Your



More veterinarians are recommending gabapentin as a useful drug for managing pain and/or anxiety.

veterinarian will develop a long-term pain-management protocol that typically involves multiple medications and therapies, often including gabapentin.

In the Mix

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are the mainstay of treatment for many painful conditions in dogs. The medications tramadol and amantadine are additional pain-treatment options, as is Chinese and herbal medicine, acupuncture, laser therapy, therapeutic ultrasound, and physical therapy. Adding gabapentin when an NSAID alone isn't enough is often helpful.

You may see some effect within 24 hours, but you won't see maximal effect for seven to 10 days. As such, dosage adjustments are usually made no more frequently than weekly. Gabapentin has a wide dosage range and safety margin, meaning the dosage can usually be repeatedly increased as needed for pain. Be patient. Gabapentin is safe and has great potential to enhance your dog's pain management and quality of life.

Gabapentin has minimal side effects. It can be sedating, especially at higher dosages. As such, drowsiness and sluggishness are the most frequently

reported side effects. Vomiting and diarrhea are occasionally reported. Gabapentin is safe with most other medications and not harmful to the kidneys or liver. It's easy to administer inside a tasty treat.

Help With Anxiety

"Gabapentin is often used as an adjunctive therapy for anxiety disorders in dogs in combination with a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (e.g., fluoxetine or sertraline) or a tricyclic antidepressant (e.g., clomipramine)," says Pamela Perry, PhD, DVM, senior behavior resident at Cornell University Hospital for Animals. It's believed that gabapentin works by calming excitable nerve impulses.

This medication alone will never be a magic bullet, miraculously eliminating your dog's angst and associated behavior issues. Anti-anxiety medications are meant to be used with behavior modification and desensitization exercises, as part of an overall behavior treatment plan.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) take several weeks to reach full effect, making gabapentin with its immediate effects a useful tool at the start of your anxiety treatment regime. Gabapentin will provide much needed relaxation and stress reduction for your dog as you begin your behavior modification/desensitization exercises, while waiting for your longer-acting meds to kick in.

For dogs who are still anxious on the maximum dose of an SSRI or TCA, adding gabapentin frequently has a synergistic effect, boosting the overall efficacy of the combination.

Gabapentin can also be used on an as-needed basis for specific situations that create undue stress for your otherwise relaxed and happy dog. Examples include veterinary visits, grooming appointments, long car rides, thunderstorms, and fireworks.

"When used as a situational drug, gabapentin is given at least 90 minutes before the anticipated stressful event," says Dr. Perry. Higher doses are usually used for these situations, making sedation an expected side effect. For dogs with extreme situational anxiety, gabapentin is used in combination with trazodone, a serotonin modulator used as a short-acting anxiolytic/sedative in veterinary medicine. ■

What You Should Know

There are three important things you must know if your dog is on gabapentin:

1. Do NOT use the human liquid formulation. This preparation contains xylitol, the artificial sweetener that is extremely toxic to dogs.
2. Never stop long-term gabapentin cold turkey. This could result in "rebound pain," which is pain that's worse than ever. For this reason, a slow taper off gabapentin is recommended.
3. If your dog is on a stomach acid-reducer, like Pepcid (famotidine) or Prilosec (omeprazole), wait at least two hours after giving the acid-reducer before giving gabapentin, as acid-reducers decrease absorption of gabapentin from the stomach.

Diets to Boost Immunity

Can a change in diet improve your dog's immune status? The answer is a very qualified "maybe."

A balanced diet is essential for a healthy immune system, but it's easy to go overboard with supplements, trying to ensure your dog's best health.

"Nutrition is vital for optimal immune function. Proteins, fats, and many vitamins and minerals are necessary for immune cells and molecules. Most pet foods are formulated to have more than adequate amounts of nutrients for normal immune function," says John Loftus, DVM, PhD, assistant professor of small animal medicine and nutrition at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

"There are some cases where supplementing a dog's diet might be beneficial to support normal immune function," says Dr. Loftus, "and your pet's primary veterinarian or a veterinary nutritionist can provide recommendations for an individual pet. Some nutrients that play important roles in the immune system, like vitamin D, can be supplemented in excess, so I don't recommend supplementing additional vitamins or minerals without checking with a vet."

GI Help

A major area of concern for immune

Supplements may help:

- ▶ Puppies with a rough start in life
- ▶ Senior dogs with chronic conditions
- ▶ Short-term for dogs with an illness such as diarrhea who benefit from probiotics
- ▶ Dogs with cancer

health is your dog's gastrointestinal (GI) tract. The whole lining of the GI tract is open to the outside world and acts to stop any pathogenic bacteria from getting access to your dog's organs and the bloodstream. Estimates range from 70% to 90% of the immune system residing in the gut. The use of probiotics can help a dog with a weak immune system gain some protection (some veterinarians suggest using a probiotic routinely).

Probiotics increase production of short-chain fatty acids in the gut such as lactic acid and acetic acid. Those fatty acids discourage the growth of pathogenic bacteria. They may include cultures of beneficial bacteria. These factors help to increase "good bacteria" and prevent overgrowth of "bad bacteria." This is what is meant when

you read about the "gut microbiome."

Probiotics are extremely safe, so they are one of the most frequently recommended supplements. They can help a dog who has a temporary case of diarrhea, ease a dog through stressful periods such as a move to a new home, and can provide relief to a dog undergoing chemotherapy whose immune system has been weakened by treatment. It is important to use a canine probiotic, however. Human probiotics are geared toward different bacteria. Most veterinarians will recommend a product

You Should Know

Safety guidelines for supplements

- ▶ Use only canine supplements. Human ones may have too high a dose or inappropriate ingredients.
- ▶ Look for supplements made by companies with a veterinary nutritionist on board.
- ▶ Over-supplementing can create problems instead of solving them.
- ▶ Look for supplements with the NASC (National Animal Supplement Council) seal of quality.
- ▶ If it sounds too good to be true, the claim is likely false. Many supplements are not backed by evidence-based medicine, although many have extensive anecdotal support.

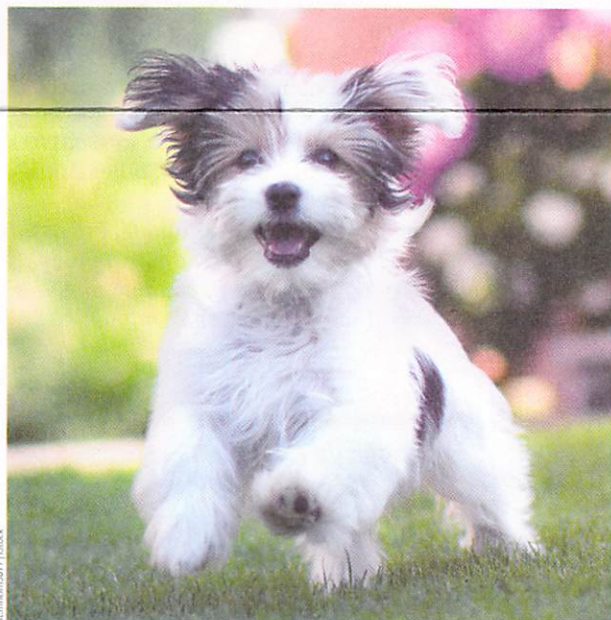
with a variety of helpful bacteria included in it, not just one strain.

Another supplement that is considered generally safe and can be helpful for dogs with stressed or weakened immune systems is a source of omega-3 fatty acids. Fish oils are the usual source, but you want sources that are likely to be free of heavy metal contamination. Follow directions closely, too much could lead to loose stools.

Bottom Line

The bottom line for immune health for your dog is to feed an appropriate, balanced, and complete diet. If you choose to cook for your dog, consult a veterinary nutritionist for a balanced recipe. A dog with an immunocompromised illness should avoid a raw diet due to the increased exposure to bacteria.

You can add some fresh food items to your dog's food if you feed a commercial diet but remember the 10% rule: no more than 10% of his diet should be "extras" or you may destroy the balance of his diet. Pro-immunity extras include red-bell peppers, berries like strawberries and blueberries, as well as spinach, carrots, or kale. Many dogs will take these offerings as training treats, or they can be added to their meals. If you feel your dog needs immune support beyond this level, consult your veterinarian. The risk of a mistake is too high. ■



For most dogs, a balanced, complete, quality diet will fill all nutritional needs, including immunity.

The Problem With Pica

Eating non-food items could indicate a GI problem

Q I have a 1-year-old terrier who eats whatever he can nab. He's healthy, playful, good bloodwork, on a probiotic, tried various dog foods, plays with my other dog, but he gulps whatever he can get a hold of—a sock, a pen, postcard, plastic bag, the insole of your shoe—his favorite is a dropped tissue.

It's not that he chews stuff. It's that he gulps it. When he's loose in the yard, he eats grass, sticks, acorns compulsively—like a pony who just escaped a muzzle—despite my trying to capture his attention with high-value treats. So, in the yard, he's either on a leash so I can move him off his find or I distract him with the ball, but he'll often leave our game for an acorn.

He's only been trained with positive reinforcement and not afraid of being scolded. He's better with lots of exercise, but it doesn't solve the problem completely. What can I do?

A The problem you described is called pica, which means eating non-food items. Don't confuse pica with a C with pika with a K. The latter is a cute rabbit-related animal that lives in the Rockies and cures grass to make the hay it lives on during the winter when it does not hibernate.

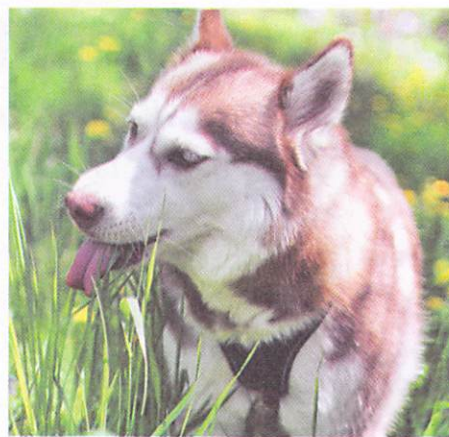
What your puppy has is pica. It can be serious if he eats something poisonous or something he can't digest, which may become stuck in his gastrointestinal tract. The big question is, why do some dogs (and cats) do this? Recently, the evidence is beginning to accumulate that the animals who do this have a gastrointestinal problem, especially an upper gastro-intestinal problem. Despite his good bloodwork, I recommend an in-depth (literally) endoscopic examination of his throat and stomach.

Meanwhile here are some things that may help:

- ▶ More exercise is always good for an adolescent puppy, so keep that up.
- ▶ Food-dispensing toys, such as balls that he can roll, puzzles that he can manipulate with his paws or muzzle to reach kibble, snuffle mats, and licking pads are great ways to prolong his meal times and satisfy his food-seeking behavior.
- ▶ A higher fiber diet, such as the weight-loss diets made by every large dog food manufacturer, might help.

We think that these dogs don't feel well and are looking for something that makes them feel better, so they keep trying remedies (they're thinking maybe tissue would help, how about acorns?).

You can use a muzzle so he can't get to things outside but still run around



The old wives' tale that dogs eat grass because they don't feel well may have merit. However, you shouldn't assume it's a self-fix.

unleashed. Be sure to have a pocket full of treats so that he gets a reward for relinquishing his latest find to you. We don't want his pica to turn into resource guarding. ■

New Study Looks at How Long Dogs Live

Of course, we all know the answer is, "Not long enough"

Common wisdom is that small dogs live longer than big dogs. A recent study out of the United Kingdom tends to support that observation, along with factors for longevity and some caveats.

Researchers looked at over 30,000 dogs that died over the period of 2016 to 2020. The dogs with the longest average lifespans were Jack Russell Terriers. The shortest lifespans went to French Bulldogs.

Life tables were set up for various parameters. Male versus female dogs, spayed and neutered versus intact dogs, dogs of the Kennel Club groups (slightly different from AKC; groups include Gundog, Hound, Pastoral, Terrier, Toy, Utility, and Working), plus crossbreds, and 18 popular purebreds.

Researchers found that female dogs tended to outlive male dogs and for both sexes, intact dogs had shorter lifespans than spayed or neutered dogs. Dogs from the Terrier and Gundog groups tended to be the longest lived with dogs from the Working Group having the shortest overall lifespans. Looking at the 18 breeds, Jack Russells were the longest lived, with Yorkshire Terriers close behind, and Border Collies third. Springer Spaniels were fourth and crossbreds (mixed breeds) were fifth.

The shortest-lived dogs were four brachycephalic breeds: French Bulldog, English Bulldog, Pug, and American Bulldog. (Cause of death was not looked at in this study.)

This study points to trends over a large population. Top-notch preventive care, good nutrition, and keeping your dog fit helps keep him alive and well. ■

Teng, K.Ty., et al. "Life tables of annual life expectancy and mortality for companion dogs in the United Kingdom," Scientific Reports, 12, 6415 (2022).



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.



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- ▶ Please Stop Barking! How It's Just PlainFun
- ▶ Get Rid of Goopy Eyes and Tear Stains