

6 Ways to Help Your Constipated Dog

While loose stools may be more common, dogs can and do get constipated. Know how to tell if your dog is truly constipated and the six ways to help resolve the problem, including one that works for both diarrhea and constipation, and seven dietary add-ins that can replace what he may be missing.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs occasionally get constipated, however, if your dog is regularly constipated, it's important to find out what's causing the problem and the best way to resolve it
- Your pet should poop at least once a day, every day; dry, hard stools that are difficult to pass are a sign your dog is constipated
- In otherwise healthy pets, most constipation is caused by lack of adequate water and/or dietary fiber; however, there are also more serious problems that can cause or worsen the condition
- The foundational treatment for constipation in dogs is offering a moisture-dense, nutritionally balanced, biologically appropriate diet
- A constant supply of fresh drinking water, daily exercise, added dietary fiber and appropriate supplements are also very important for constipated pets

Although diarrhea is a more common, and much more noticeable digestive issue in pets than constipation, dogs can and do get constipated. For some animals it's a once-in-blue-moon type of thing, while in others it can become habitual.

The problem with irregularity is that when stool stays in your pet's colon too long, all the moisture in it is absorbed, and it becomes dry, hard, and difficult to pass. Left untreated, chronic constipation can lead to megacolon (especially in cats). Megacolon is a terrible condition in which the large intestine stretches so much it can no longer do its job effectively.

Obviously, our goal as pet parents is to make sure our furry family members never suffer from constipation, so let's first talk about likely causes for the condition.

What's Causing Your Dog's Constipation?

Fortunately, much of the time a pet's constipation is simply the result of inadequate water consumption or lack of dietary fiber. But sometimes the problem is more complicated, involving an obstruction inside the colon or a problem in the pelvic cavity, such as a tumor that interferes with bowel function.

For example, if your dog swallows a big chunk of bone, it can lodge in his bowel and cause an obstruction that prevents passage of stool. If he's having trouble pooping and he's been known to eat things he shouldn't, my advice is to contact your veterinarian if the situation doesn't improve in a day or two.

If you actually saw your pet swallow something that could cause an obstruction, get veterinary help right away as this situation can rapidly progress to a very serious and even fatal problem.

Intact males, especially if they're older, can develop enlarged prostates that compress the colon, creating very thin stools or even an obstruction. This problem can usually be resolved by having your pet neutered.

Hernias in the rectum are another obstruction that can cause constipation. The hernia bulges into the rectum, closing off passage of stool. Hernias usually require surgery to repair.

Constipation can also be the result of a neuromuscular problem or a disease like hypothyroidism or hypercalcemia. Some pets have insufficient muscle tone or neuromuscular disorders that impede their body's ability to efficiently move waste through the colon.

Other causes of constipation can include infected or cancerous anal glands, or a hip or pelvic injury that makes pooping painful, the effects of surgery, certain medications (including morphine pain relievers), iron supplements, and stress.

How to Tell if Your Dog Is Constipated

Your pet should poop at least once every single day because it's an important part of his body's natural detoxification process.

Your dog is constipated when he either has difficulty pooping (and the stool he produces is dry and hard), or he isn't pooping at all. This is why it's so important to keep an eye on those daily deposits. The quantity, color, texture, and smell, along with the presence of mucus or blood in your pet's feces (and urine), are all indicators of his general well-being.

Often, what passes from (or in the case of constipation, doesn't pass from) your pet's body is the first sign of a health problem, so you should regularly monitor your dog's potty area and familiarize yourself with what "normal" looks like for your pet.

On potty walks, constipated dogs tend to look like they're trying to go or need to go, but nothing's happening. If after a few minutes of hunching and straining your dog doesn't go or produces poop that is small, hard and dry, you can reasonably assume he's constipated.

Sometimes constipated dogs appear bloated and painful, especially when trying unsuccessfully to poop. The stool a constipated dog does manage to pass is often darker than normal and may contain mucus, blood or strange debris.

Left untreated, a constipated pet may begin to vomit intermittently, lose his appetite, and start dropping weight. He may seem lethargic. Hopefully, the problem won't progress to this point before you take action.

6 Ways to Help a Problem Pooper

Assuming your dog is in otherwise good health, there are several things you can do to help resolve her constipation issues.

1. If you're feeding kibble, I strongly encourage you to switch to a moisture-rich, nutritionally balanced, species-specific diet. It's always the first thing I recommend, especially for dogs with any sort of digestive issue. Be absolutely sure your pet's diet is nutritionally balanced. Many of the homemade recipes I've analyzed have two to three times the upper safe limits of calcium levels recommended for pets, which will lead to constipation, among many other things.
2. Make sure your dog has access to clean, fresh, filtered drinking water at all times. Place a few bowls around the house in areas she frequents. If your pet isn't drinking enough, consider adding bone broth to her food to increase the moisture content in her diet.
3. Dogs need to move their bodies through play and exercise. Movement also helps stool transit through the colon. Regular physical activity can help prevent or remedy constipation.
4. Add **digestive enzymes** and probiotics to your pet's meals. These supplements will help with maldigestion, which is often the cause of both occasional constipation and diarrhea.
5. If your pet lived in the wild, his natural prey would provide ample fiber in the form of fur, feathers and predigested gut contents. Needless to say, domesticated pets don't get a lot of these things in their meals! Good replacement options for your four-legged companion include:
 - **Organic acacia or psyllium husk powder** — 1/2 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight 1-2 times daily on food
 - **Ground dark green leafy veggies** — 1 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight 1-2 times daily with food
 - **Coconut oil** — 1/2 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight 1-2 times daily
 - **Canned 100% pumpkin** — 1 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight 1-2 times daily on food
 - **Organic apple cider vinegar (ACV), raw and unfiltered** — 1/4 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight added to food 1-2 times daily
 - **Whole leaf aloe juice (not the topical gel)** — 1/4 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight 1-2 times daily on food
6. Chiropractic, acupuncture, and massage therapy can also be very beneficial in helping to alleviate chronic constipation in pets.

Please note these recommendations are for dogs experiencing a minor, transient bout of constipation. If your pet's condition is not resolving or seems chronic, or if you aren't sure of the cause, again, your best option is to talk with your veterinarian.

Sources & References

[PetMD, April 5, 2022](#)
