

Never, Ever Scold Your Dog for This, It May Not Be Their Fault

There's a good chance your pet already feels confused or even ashamed if they are doing this. Many already know that they shouldn't, but it's beyond their control. Eight things to consider if your pet starts doing this and what to do to help them.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Urinary incontinence is the involuntary leakage of urine, and is beyond the control of your dog
- The condition is most often hormone-induced as a result of spaying or neutering, and is more common in female dogs
- Other causes of urine dribbling include damage to the pudendal nerve; diseases of the bladder, kidney or adrenal glands; bladder stones or a urethral obstruction; birth defects, and age-related incontinence
- The cause of urinary incontinence should determine what treatment is given; unfortunately, traditional treatments for hormone-induced urinary incontinence involve drugs that carry side effects
- Successful management of hormone-induced urinary incontinence can often be accomplished using a combination of natural therapies

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Urinary incontinence, or urine dribbling, is involuntary and dogs with the condition have no control over the leaking. Urinary incontinence is different from other urination-related problems like too-frequent urination or behavioral issues such as submissive urination.

How to Know if Your Dog Has Urinary Incontinence

Involuntary passage of urine typically occurs while your dog is sleeping or resting. She stands up and you notice urine leakage. It can range from a small damp spot to a good soaking depending on how much urine is being passed. Or you might notice a problem when she jumps up on the couch or into your lap and leaks a bit of urine, or she dribbles while walking or running through the house.

Again, please understand your pet isn't intentionally leaking urine, and she hasn't lost her housetraining. She has no control over what's happening. This is not about her behavior, it's a medical problem, and so correcting or punishing her is both counterproductive and unkind. In fact, many dogs become upset when they realize they're inadvertently "pottying" where they know they shouldn't.

A dog will be confused and even ashamed to know she's leaving urine in inappropriate spots. That's why it's so important to treat urine dribbling as a medical problem requiring a medical diagnosis rather than a behavioral problem requiring behavior correction or worse, punishment.

Causes of Urinary Leaking

- **Hormone-induced urinary incontinence** — This is by far the most common reason for involuntary urine leakage in dogs. After a dog is spayed or neutered, the sex hormones estrogen and testosterone, which are necessary to help close the external urethral sphincter, are no longer available. This can result in urine dribbling.

Hormone-induced urinary incontinence is extremely common in spayed female dogs, and somewhat less common in neutered males. These are typically healthy, energetic pets that just happen to dribble urine anywhere from multiple times a day to just once or twice a year.

- **Age-related urinary incontinence** — Older pets can develop a weak pelvic floor or poor bladder tone that can result in urine dribbling. If your dog has signs of canine senility or dementia, he can also simply forget to signal you when he needs to potty outside. His bladder can overfill, and there can be leakage.
- **Damage to the pudendal nerve** — This is a problem of the lower back in dogs, often in older dogs with arthritis, degenerative myelopathy or joint disease, or trauma to the lower back. If the pudendal nerve, which works the neck of your pet's bladder, is impinged, the bladder neck can remain slightly open, allowing urine leakage.
- **Birth defects** — Certain birth defects can cause incontinence. If your puppy has been difficult or impossible to housetrain, there could be a birth defect present. An example: the ureter, which is a tube that collects urine from the kidneys and passes it into the bladder, can bypass the bladder entirely and go directly to the urethra.

This condition, known as an ectopic ureter, will cause urine, as it's produced, to dribble right out of your pet's body. Some dog breeds have more of these types of from-birth plumbing problems than others, including Siberian Huskies, Miniature Poodles, Labrador Retrievers, Collies, Westies, Wirehaired Fox Terriers and Corgis. If your puppy is leaking urine, you should investigate the possibility of a birth defect.

- **Bladder stones** — A dog with a bladder stone will often strain while trying to urinate. He'll appear to successfully empty his bladder, but when he's back inside he'll continue to leak urine. If you've noticed this going on with your dog, you need to consider the possibility of bladder stones.
- **Urethral obstruction** — Obstruction of the urethra can also cause involuntary passage of urine. A tumor, for example, can obstruct urine flow and cause dribbling. So can urethral stones.

It's important to know that a stone in your pet's urethra is a medical emergency. You may notice along with urine leakage that your dog is in pain, seems stressed and might even act panicked. This can be because she needs to empty her bladder and can't. The bladder is filling up with urine and there's no way for her to relieve the mounting pressure.

You should seek veterinary care immediately if she seems to have pain along with incontinence, and especially if she's not able to pass any urine at all.

- **Certain diseases** — A disease of the bladder, kidneys or adrenals, Cushing's disease, hypothyroidism, a urinary tract infection (UTI), and diabetes can all cause dribbling of urine.
- **Central nervous system (CNS) trauma** — If your pet's brain or spinal cord isn't signaling correctly to the bladder, this miscommunication can cause urine dribbling.

Urinary Incontinence Treatments to Avoid

Some of the traditional drugs used to treat urinary incontinence, specifically DES (diethylstilbestrol), are toxic with side effects that can create more problems (e.g., diabetes and cancer) for your pet than the problem you set out to correct. Because of its overall systemic risk to health, this drug isn't recommended.

Another commonly prescribed drug for urinary incontinence is called PPA, which is substantially safer than DES, but one of the biggest problems with these drugs is that many veterinarians put dogs on them without investigating the cause of the urine dribbling. They just assume it's hormone-induced.

Dogs on these drugs turn out to have a disease process causing the leakage. Often urinary crystals or bladder stones, Cushing's disease, diabetes or kidney disease are seen in a dog being treated for hormone-induced urinary incontinence. Synthetic hormone replacement drugs can cause some of the same problems in female dogs as they do in women who take them. If your pet is dribbling urine, consider working with an integrative veterinarian to determine what's causing the problem.

Dogs with incontinence that can't be completely resolved can be fitted with dog bloomers or panties with absorbent pads. You can even use human disposable diapers and cut a hole for the tail. Just remember that urine is caustic and should not remain on your pet's skin for long periods, so if you use diapers, be sure to change them frequently or remove them during times when your pet isn't likely to be incontinent.

Natural Treatment Options

The cause of your dog's urinary incontinence will dictate what treatment she receives. If there's an underlying disease process or structural abnormality causing the problem, and it can be corrected through medical management and/or surgery, that's obviously the way to go.

If your pet is diagnosed with hormone-induced urinary incontinence, consider attempting to treat the problem naturally. Cases of hormone-induced urinary incontinence have been successfully treated with Standard Process glandular therapy (Symplex-F for female dogs and Symplex-M for male dogs) and other glandular products that are blended for female and male hormone support.

Consider using natural, biologically appropriate (nonsynthetic) hormone replacement therapy, as well as herbal remedies such as corn silk, lemon balm, lignans and horsetail, as well as nutraceuticals specifically formulated to address urine leakage. Acupuncture can help improve function of the pudendal nerve and control or stimulate sufficient closure of the external urethral sphincter. Chiropractic care can also keep the CNS working properly, aiding in normal bladder and neurologic function.

Sources and References

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