



VOMITING AND DIARRHEA

My pet gets occasional upset stomachs. There may be some vomiting and/or diarrhea. It seems to take me a long time to get his digestive tract back to normal.

There can be so many causes of vomiting and diarrhea. Some are minor and may be resolved at home while others may be more severe and require prompt medical attention. Don't feel pressured to "self-diagnose" and risk losing a treasured companion. If you have any doubt or question, please seek veterinary attention.

When should I try to treat this at home and what symptoms should prompt a vet visit?

Most cases of vomiting or diarrhea are caused by what we term as "indiscretion" which means eating something they shouldn't have. This might be self-imposed or intentionally given, but the result is the same. Any pet that persists with vomiting or diarrhea or becomes lethargic, unresponsive or weak, should be taken in for treatment.

What is the best way to get his digestive track back to normal? What foods should I feed him? What foods should I avoid? How often should he be fed? How long should it take him to get back to normal?

Generally, if the pet is active, alert and acting normally other than the vomiting or diarrhea, we recommend that you try withholding the food for 24 hours, resume feeding small amounts of a bland food such as boiled rice and chicken, and 3-4 small feedings per day. If the pet responds and the vomiting or diarrhea resolves, the regular food may be gradually reintroduced, mixing in with the rice and chicken over 2-3 days.

Are there any activities we should avoid when he is feeling this way?

Usually the pets will restrict their own activity until they are feeling better. If it seems that activity worsens the symptoms, then discontinue the activity until the diarrhea or vomiting have resolved.

Are there any "human" stomach medications he can have to settle his stomach? If so, what is the dosage? Are there any "human" stomach medications to avoid?

If someone would like to try something at home for treatment, *Pepto Bismol* can be given for vomiting at a dosage of 5 mls (1 tsp) per 20 lbs every 8 hours as needed. *Kaopectate* can assist with diarrhea and is given at the same dosage of 5 mls per 20 lbs every 8 hours as needed.

I don't recommend *Immodium* (due to slowing of the gastrointestinal tract) or *Tylenol* (which has a narrow margin of safety in dogs and is very toxic to cats).



Some veterinarians use anti-acid treatments (such as *Tagamet*) but I haven't seen a favorable response for resolving acute vomiting.

Some more severe causes of vomiting or diarrhea that require medical care:

- **Pancreatitis** - Usually presents with severe vomiting, weakness and lethargy. Most often caused by a high fat meal (such as table foods) that causes inflammation within the pancreas and may be life threatening.
- **Colitis** - Diarrhea characterized by frequent attempts to defecate, small amounts of soft stools with blood or mucous, straining to defecate.
- **Parasitism** - caused by worm (hookworms, roundworms or whipworms) or protozoal (Coccidia or Giardia) infections. We usually perform fecal checks on most cases of vomiting or diarrhea to rule out these possibilities.
- **Inflammatory Bowel Disease** - Most often a chronic vomiting or diarrhea with an intolerance for certain foods. Some cases respond to hypoallergenic diets with unusual proteins (such as venison, fish, duck) as used with food allergy cases.
- **Pancreatic Insufficiency** - Different from Pancreatitis as it is a more chronic condition in which the pancreas does not produce the normal digestive enzymes. Usually associated with moderate to severe weight loss.

What do you mean by giving my pet "bland" food? What other foods besides rice and chicken are OK? Scrambled eggs, baby food, sweet potato, others? You recommend rice and chicken. We find a lot of dogs are allergic to chicken. What other meat/poultry can be used? Also, I have read that dogs should never get white rice, just brown. Any truth to that?

Lots of folks have trouble with figuring out what "bland" is. Bland can mean many things that are generally low-fat. Scrambled eggs have been well tolerated as have low-fat cottage cheese or other bland carbs such as oatmeal or grits. I think it might be safest to just use rice and not add anything else. I have had some clients use boiled hamburger with the fat removed but you still have the allergy issue (maybe more so than chicken).

White rice is fine for the dogs and I think in cases of diarrhea or vomiting, I would not want the extra fiber of brown rice that might be a little irritating.

How long should you try the bland diet before calling your vet?

I really think 48 hours is an appropriate amount of time for a "routine" case of vomiting or diarrhea to resolve. I think letting a problem drag on for weeks would be uncomfortable for the pet, could create secondary problems with vitamin or electrolyte imbalances, and could spread the problem if an infection is involved.

One case in particular that I remember was a puppy that had Giardia and the adolescent child at home contracted the infection due to fecal contact and inadequate sanitation. There are many reports of people (quite often children) that acquired intestinal worms, like roundworms or hookworms, from their pet as they left a diarrhea case untreated.