

# The Pet Set

## Diarrhea in Dogs: Causes and Treatment

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[Diarrhea](#) is characterized by frequent loose or liquid bowel movements. It can be caused by something as simple as a change in diet or a more serious illness or infection. Diarrhea may be sudden in onset and short in duration. It can also last for weeks to months or occur off and on. A single bout of diarrhea is generally not a cause for concern in [dogs](#) -- but if it persists for more than a day, it can lead to dehydration, or it may indicate an underlying health issue and should be checked out by a veterinarian.

### What Causes Diarrhea in Dogs?

- Change in diet
- [Food](#) intolerance
- Ingestion of garbage or spoiled [food](#)
- Ingestion of poisonous substances or toxic plant material
- Ingestion of foreign body (for example, toy, rubber band, plastic bag, etc.)
- Allergic reaction
- Bacterial or viral infection
- Internal parasites, such as [roundworms](#), coccidia and giardia
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Kidney or [liver disease](#)
- [Cancer](#) or other tumors of the digestive tract
- Certain medications
- Colitis
- [Stress](#)
- Hemorrhagic gastroenteritis

### What Are the General Symptoms of Diarrhea?

Loose or liquid, frequent stools are the most common symptoms of diarrhea in [dogs](#). Other signs include flatulence, blood or mucus in stool, changes in volume of stool and straining to defecate. Lethargy, dehydration, [fever](#), vomiting, decreased appetite, weight loss and an increased urgency to defecate may also accompany diarrhea.

If your [dog](#)'s diarrhea is black, he could be experiencing internal bleeding of the stomach or small intestine and should be examined by a vet immediately.

### **How Do I Treat Diarrhea?**

It is often recommended that you avoid giving your dog any [food](#) for 12-24 hours while he's experiencing diarrhea, but do provide plenty of fresh, clean water to stave off dehydration. Check with your veterinarian about the proper course of treatment for your dog's specific case.

### **When Should I Take My Dog to the Vet?**

Bring your dog to the vet if his diarrhea continues for more than a day, or if you observe lethargy, vomiting, fever, dark-colored or bloody stools, straining to defecate, decreased appetite or unexplained weight loss. Contact your veterinarian immediately if you notice your [puppy](#) has diarrhea, as it can be an important indicator of serious diseases in young dogs.

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### **What Can I Expect at the Vet's Office?**

Your veterinarian will examine your dog for underlying illnesses and assess for dehydration. He or she may take a stool sample to check for the presence of internal parasites, as well as conduct blood tests to identify a possible cause of the diarrhea.

Other diagnostic tests might include radiographs, ultrasound, cultures, endoscopy and biopsy. The diagnostic tests performed and treatment recommended will depend on how long the diarrhea has been going on and the severity of your dog's condition.

### **Are Certain Dogs Prone to Diarrhea?**

There are certain [breeds](#) that may be predisposed to developing conditions that lead to diarrhea. German shepherds, for example, are known to have an increased prevalence of exocrine pancreatic insufficiency in the breed. Young dogs are more likely to have infectious and parasitic-related diarrhea than adult dogs.

### **How Can I Prevent Diarrhea?**

Keep in mind that even perfectly healthy dogs will sometimes get diarrhea. Here are tips to reduce the likelihood of occurrence:

- Keep up to date with your dog's vaccinations.
- Make sure your dog is free of parasites by following your veterinarian's recommendations.
- Don't let your dog have access to garbage, spoiled [food](#), etc.
- When walking your dog, watch that he does not eat anything off the street, does not eat plant material or drink from puddles.
- Do not allow him to ingest feces from other animals.
- Minimize stress in your dog's environment.
- If you decide to switch your dog's food, it's a good idea to introduce it gradually, mixing it with his current food to ensure an easier transition for your pet's GI tract.

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