Points on Pets: Owners of garbage-eating dog need to clean up their act

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: During the last several years our dog has had several bouts of vomiting and diarrhea. We have not worried too much about this since she is allowed to run free outside and we know that she often eats garbage and other stuff left along our road. We have always assumed that this is what dogs do. However, more recently we have noticed that our dog's stools are gray and have a very bad odor.

Should we be worried about our dog's abnormal stool, vomiting and diarrhea? Although it might not seem like it, we really do care about our dog.

A: You should have your veterinarian conduct a complete physical examination of your dog as soon as possible to determine what is causing her digestive tract problems. Frequent bouts of vomiting, diarrhea and bad-smelling stools are not normal.

It is possible that your dog has pancreatitis, either as a primary disease or as a secondary problem related to some other serious disease. The pancreas is a very important organ located in the abdomen. It normally produces the hormones, insulin and glucagon, and secretes digestive enzymes. Insulin and glucagon help regulate the use of sugar by cells located throughout the entire body.

Pancreatitis is probably the most commonly diagnosed pancreatic disease in dogs. The diseased pancreas can produce enzymes that can literally destroy the dog's own tissues. In other words, the diseased pancreas can cause digestion of itself. This autodigestion causes leakage of digestive enzymes into the abdomen which eventually leads to tissue destruction and generalized infection.

Untreated pancreatitis can become a very serious, life-threatening disease. However, if the signs are recognized early in the course of the disease and appropriate treatment is promptly begun, the chance of recovery is good. Treatment usually includes controlling the dog's diet very carefully and giving the dog medications.

Of course you should supervise your dog better. Allowing your dog to run free along the road and eat garbage is not being responsible. Your veterinarian can give you additional advice regarding the proper care of your dog.

Q: Why do some dogs scoot? This is such disgusting behavior!

A: Although commonly thought by many to be due to worms, scooting is usually seen in dogs with impacted or infected anal glands, not worms. Dogs have a pair of anal glands, one on each side of their anal sphincters. Normally, a very small amount of very bad-smelling fluid is excreted from these glands every time a dog defecates. This fluid coats the excreted stool.

Impacted anal glands are often seen in dogs on poor diets and in those dogs which do not exercise regularly. If left untreated, impacted anal glands usually become infected and eventually develop into abscesses which cause pain. Affected dogs often scoot and bite at their tails to relieve this pain.

If your dog is scooting, you should have it examined by your veterinarian as soon as possible. It is not normal for dogs to scoot and bite at their tails.

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