

Dogs eat the strangest things!

Look what the cat dragged in! I've always liked this little idiom. Especially when used during good natured banter with my kids. Ever wonder why we never say "look what the dog dragged in"? After a little thought it's clear to me that a dog would likely chew up and swallow whatever it finds long before any dragging comes to mind. I think we'd all agree that cats are much more discriminating as to what they'll put in their mouth, let alone what they'll swallow. Don't misunderstand, cats do eat some weird things-sewing needle and thread is not uncommon-but dogs are far and away the champs when it comes to eating strange objects. I wish I had a list of all the things I have taken out of dogs' intestines since becoming a veterinarian 22 years ago. I can't recall all of them, but here's a few I do remember.

A long time ago just after graduation I recall a sick Boxer that had swallowed a good portion of a baseball mitt. Nothing a little surgery couldn't fix. Then there's the dog that chewed on a free sample of super glue that came in the mail. See if you can picture this: Mail delivered through slot in front door; dog barking vehemently from behind the door as mail man makes a hasty retreat; dog quiets down and decides it's a good day to chew up the mail. Never really swallowed any of the super glue but yes, you guessed it, she walked in our office with her teeth stuck together. After a little work and running cold water over the teeth the glue gave way.

Cloth objects or clothing make up a large group of intestinal foreign objects I've seen. Socks, towels, shirts, undergarments-all in a day's work. The most infamous undergarment case I remember was the dog that presented to us with the usual belly-ache and vomiting. On X-ray all we could see was a small metal object in the shape of the letter "V". Alone the object was small enough to easily pass through the gut without incident; it had to be attached to something. That something was just not visible on x-rays; as so many foreign objects are. We struggled to explain it, but the pet owner wasted no time in making this diagnosis. Reviewing the X-rays with us, she quickly identified the "V" as the insignia on a pair of her underwear from Victoria's Secret. Surgery proved her correct. I guess I'll know better next time.

Plastic toys, balls (three tennis balls in the stomach of one dog!), dolls, shoes, mops, rope, string, chews, dog biscuits, bones, rocks, wood chips, and whole carcasses of large rodents pretty much rounds out the list that I can recall-and I've probably forgotten some.

While amusing to think back on, each one of these cases posed serious and potentially life-threatening issues for these pets. No joking matter. If your dog is a "chewer", limit his/her access to objects that are even close to small enough to swallow (remember the dog that swallowed three tennis balls above). Don't increase the risk by giving your dog any real bones or small chews that could be swallowed whole. Any chew material (rawhide, hoof material, dental cleaning type, etc) poses some risk, so monitor your dog's indulgence. Even with diligence and care some dogs (especially puppies) just manage to get into stuff.

So the next time your dog is acting sick, throwing up or maybe not eating, and especially if he has a guilty look on his face, better have your vet take an X-ray.

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