Health and Nutrition

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| *The contents of this page are general advice only. Please consult your veterinarian if you have any questions or suspect something may be wrong with your dog.*    What does a healthy dog look like?  A healthy dog has a shiny coat, bright eyes and enough energy and enthusiasm to keep up with the demands of being a companion and competitor. Health includes genetic health, physical health and mental health. Read on for information on keeping your dog healthy and caring for it when it is not. |

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| Sick as a dog  When people get sick, they can tell the doctor how they feel. What happens when your dog gets sick? Your dog can’t talk, so it’s up to you to know when he needs veterinary attention.   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | The best way to start is to be an observant dog owner. Watch how your dog acts when it feels fine. Any obvious change in your dog’s behaviour is usually a sign that something may be wrong. If a dog that usually bolts down it’s food is suddenly leaving their dinner unfinished, it could be ill  Aside from loss of appetite, an owner should watch for: diarrhoea, constipation, excessive drooling or drinking, depression, sudden aggression, difficulty breathing, |   restlessness, lameness, swelling or tenderness, vomiting, fever, runny nose, gummy eyes, coughing or sneezing. All can be symptoms of illness.    If no obvious reason can explain a change in your pet’s behaviour, and the condition does not improve in a day or two, call your local vet. Symptoms that may seem insignificant can hide serious illnesses. Proper diagnosis and treatment from a vet will give your dog the best chance of a complete recovery.    Dental care  Dental care helps keep your dog in top form. Your dog depends on you to help him stay healthy. Good dental hygiene can play an important role in keeping your dog in top form. Clean your dog's teeth and check his gums regularly.   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Healthy gums are firm and pink, black, or spotted. Young dogs have smooth white teeth that tend to darken with age. Puppies have 23 baby teeth, and adults have around 42 permanent teeth, depending on the breed. As adult teeth come in, they push baby teeth out of the mouth.  To check your dog's mouth, talk to him gently, then put your hand over the muzzle and lift up the sides of his |   mouth. Check that adult teeth are coming in as they should, and are not being crowded by baby teeth. Look for soft white matter or hard white, yellow, or brown matter on the teeth. This is plaque or tartar and should be brushed away. Make sure your dogs gums are healthy and his breath is not foul-smelling. Mouth infections can lead to serious problems in the gums and other parts of the body, including the heart, so it's important to give your dog's teeth and mouth special attention.  Clean your dog's teeth frequently with special toothbrushes and toothpaste designed for dogs. If your dog balks at having his teeth brushed, get him used to it by rubbing his teeth and gums with your finger. Then put a little of the toothpaste on your finger and let him sniff and lick it; do the same with the toothbrush. Make sure to provide chew toys or other products that will help clean his teeth. As your dog gets older, he may have a buildup of tartar that requires special cleaning by a veterinarian.    Preventative Care Dogs are hardy animals but require a few precautions to ensure they remain healthy.  When you purchase your dog ask for its vaccination certificate which will be signed by a veterinarian. If your dog or puppy has had no previous vaccinations or if you are unsure whether it has been vaccinated, you should take it to your veterinarian to receive a health check and vaccinations for Canine Distemper, Viral Hepatitis, Parvo Virus and Kennel Cough. Puppies require the first vaccinations between 6 - 8 weeks with the second at 12 - 16 weeks old. All dogs require a 'booster' vaccination every 12 months.  Dogs need to be wormed regularly to control roundworms, hookworms and tapeworms which live in the intestine. This is easily done by using one of the many available preparations, either as tablets or liquids. All dogs should be wormed every three months, although puppies must be done more frequently. Follow the instructions on the preparations or consult your veterinarian.  Heartworm is transmitted by mosquitoes, is present in many areas of Australia and can be fatal. There are several preventative products now available including daily or monthly tablets.  All dogs other than very young puppies must be tested by a veterinarian before starting a heartworm prevention program as the medication can be fatal to dogs already infected.  Fleas and ticks are often a problem during the warmer months. Adult fleas present on the dog may be killed using sprays, powders, rinses or flea collars, but is necessary to treat other pets and also the environment, especially the dog's bedding. Precautions and directions on the packaging of the flea control products must be followed exactly.  Paralysis ticks occur in some areas of Australia and can be fatal to dogs. If you live in an area where there are paralysis ticks you should check your dog daily and remove any ticks. If a tick is found consult your veterinarian.  Dogs will eat anything (and some of its poison)by Jeff Grognet, DVM   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Dogs are curious creatures; they also like to eat. This sometimes gets them in trouble when they devour something they shouldn’t. Dog owners must be aware of the products, foods, and plants that are hazardous to their pets, and they also must be able to recognise symptoms of poisoning. This is extremely important because the sooner care is sought, the better the outcome for the dog. |   Antifreeze, the sweet slayer Antifreeze is the granddaddy of all poison. This radiator additive contains a toxic substance called ethylene glycol (EG), with a deceptively sweet taste that disguises its ability to kill. Small spills on the garage floor from a leaky radiator may go unnoticed by everyone – except the dog.    The lethal dose of EG for an average sized Labrador Retriever is only an ounce or two. Once ingested, EG is converted to oxalate, which combines with calcium in the dog’s blood to form crystals. These block the tubules in the kidneys, leading to acute renal failure. Because it takes time for EG to change to oxalate, there is a small window of time to treat poisoning. Waiting a little too long can mean the difference between life and death.  The first symptoms of EG poisoning are a sweet breath odor combined with nausea and vomiting. Dogs may initially act drunk or uncoordinated, but within hours they show progressive depression, drooling, and an inability to stand.    In one tragic case, I saw two Dalmatians stricken with this poison. The first one came in vomiting and could hardly stand. A quick urine and blood test confirmed our suspicions: He was in kidney failure. Luckily, the owner had brought his other dog alon too. Testing showed he was in trouble as well, but not yet showing any signs. Both dogs received a dose of alcohol intravenously (one emergency protocol for antifreeze poisoning). Only the second dog survived.    Chocolate, a toxic indulgence Though we think of chocolate as just a delicious (but fattening) treat, an indulgent dog may find it lethal. Dogs metabolize the chemicals in chocolate differently than humans do. An ounce of milk chocolate per pound of canine can kill a dog; unsweetened baker’s chocolate is 10 times more potent.     |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | The main ingredient in chocolate is theobromine, a heart and central nervous system stimulant. In the early stages of chocolate poisoning, vomiting, diarrhea, and restlessness are combined with excessive drinking and urinating. This escalates to hyperexcitability, muscle tremors, seizures, and an abnormal hear rhythm. Death occurs from 18 hours to a few days later, due to cardiac and respiratory failure. If a dog shows any of these |   signs,he needs treatment combined with intensive monitoring. Vomiting may be induced if the poisoning is caught soon enough after ingestion, or activated charcoal can be given to absorb the toxin.    One of my patients, an elderly terrier named Howard, ate a chocolate Easter bunny. Thankfully, the worst symptom he developed was seizures that were easily controlled with Valium. Unfortunately, Howard had extensive arthritis. The violent muscle activity during the seizures strained his joints and he could hardly walk for days afterward.    Grapes and raisin, the forbidden fruit   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Though they may seem unlikely poisons, grapes and their dried-out relatives, raisins, can be hazardous. At first, researchers looked for toxins (pesticides and such) on the grapes to account for poisonings, but this would not explain cases of dogs who were affected after eating organic grapes directly off backyard vines. Clearly it was the grapes themselves that contained the toxic substance, although the specific poison has not yet been identified. |   Whatever the toxin in this fruit, dogs are highly susceptible to it. The average toxic dose is about a half pound of grapes for a medium-sized dog, but much smaller quantities have caused death. Early signs of poisoning include vomiting and diarrhea, loss of appetite, depression, and abdominal pain. As the kidneys deteriorate over time, urine production stops. Intensive, rapid treatment is needed to retain kidney function.    Xylitol, the hazardous additive Xylitol is an artificial sweetener found in sugarless gum, beverages, toothpaste, and cereals. While it’s harmless to people, it triggers a massive release of insulin in dogs. The animal’s blood sugar drops precipitously within an hour of ingestion. Clinical signs include vomiting, weakness, depression, lack of coordination, and even seizures. Xylitol poisoning is treated with intravenous glucose.    One case report told of a Dobermann who ate a pack of gum: It killed him. Keep this toxin away from dogs.   Plants, the growing threat Plant toxicities are challenging to veterinarians. Toxins vary with the plant, the stage of its growing season, and the part ingested.    The poinsettia irritates the digestive tract, triggering abdominal pain with vomiting and diarrhea. But contrary to popular belief, it has not further serious side effects. Many spring flowers, such as tulips, daffodils, and narcissus, can trigger intense vomiting, diarrhea, convulsions, and other serious symptoms of poisoning. Azaleas and rhododendrons cause similar signs and can lead to death from cardiovascular collapse.    Onion, a fatal food   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | I was told many years ago by a veterinary pathologist that the amount of onion in a Big Mac was enough to trigger poisoning symptoms in a dog. A toxic agent in onions damages red blood cells and destroys hemoglobin, diminishing the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood.  I once saw a tiny Maltese after he had a seizure. When I examined him, I found he had pale gums. This prompted me to do a blood test that revealed he was drastically anemic, but not enough to require a blood transfusion. His seizure was triggered by a lack of oxygen to the brain. I quizzed the owner |   and found out she had recently modified her homemade dog food receipt – by adding onion. A new batch of food, without onions, solved her dog’s problem.    Medicine: not what the doctor ordered Over the counter medications considered safe for people can be toxic, if not deadly, to dogs. Low doses of ibuprofen can trigger stomach ulcers after just a few days of treatment. Besides extreme stomach pain, ibuprofen can cause dogs to lose life-threatening amount of blood. A Labrador Retriever was lucky to survive after eating a half bottle of Advil. Intensive intravenous fluids were required to maintain his renal function when the ibuprofen attacked his kidneys. Other medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) and acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin) can cause similar problems.   *This article first appeared in the AKC Gazette and is reprinted with permission. To subscribe to the Gazette, please go to www.akc.org/pubs/index.cfm.  The author must be contacted for reprinting this article. Jeff Grognet is a practicing veterinarian in Qualicum Beach, BC, Canada combining traditional medicine, acupuncture, and VOM. He writes extensively for pet publications and also teaches online courses for veterinary assistants (www.ed2go.com - click on "take a course," then "personal enrichment," then "health care, nutrition and fitness".*    Peanuts!  by Shelley Bueche   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | For the nearly two million Americans suffering with a form of peanut (legume) allergy, daily life becomes a complex proposition of food avoidance. Reactions for those who are allergic can range from a mild rash to sudden death from anaphylactic shock.     Enter the Peanut Detection Do g. The PDD is one of the newest working dogs in the US. They are trained to respond to even the slightest scent of peanuts in the form of food, oil, or paste, and to alert their allergic owner before a potential problem occurs. Peanut dogs also alert to cross |   contamination,and can warn their owner of food that has been on the same assembly line with peanuts, even if it doesn’t actually contain peanut products.    Southern Star Ranch, a training facility in Florence, Texas, that trains a range of detector dogs (from narcotics to termites) is one centre that has already had success training PDDs. The breeds most commonly used for peanut detection are Poodles, Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers and German Shepherd Dogs.    For more information on how a PDD can change a peanut allergy suffers life, visit <http://www.peanutdog.com/>  *This article first appeared in the AKC Gazette and is reprinted with permission. To subscribe to the Gazette, please go to www.akc.org/pubs/index.cfm.*  Healing Gardensby Denise Flaim  For many people, herbs have a mystical connotation. They are magical elixirs, mysterious healing agents, the stuff of Shakespearean witches and marathon episodes of Charmed. But never mind those ‘hoodoo’ clichés.  While herbs are natural, they are not by definition benign. Any agent that has the ability to heal can also harm, and it is crucial to consult a qualified veterinarian before administering any herb. [Read more](http://www.dogsvictoria.org.au/Portals/0/assets/caring/healing%20gardens.pdf)  *This article first appeared in the AKC Gazette and is reprinted with permission. To subscribe to the Gazette, please go to www.akc.org/pubs/index.cfm.* |