



My Dog Just Swallowed A ...

Pica is the behavior of “persistent chewing and consumption of non-nutritional substances that provide no physical benefit to the animal” (Troff). While most animals will occasionally chew or swallow non-food item such as rocks, dirt, wood, fabric or paper, other animals appear to crave or seek them out. This behavior can be accidentally taught or be caused by a medical problem such as a nutritional deficiency, anxiety, boredom or compulsive disorder. Because this behavior poses a medical risk to a pet a combinations medical/behavioral approach is best in treating the problem.

Nutritional and medical problems

It is critical to rule out or treat medical problems when dealing with Pica. Food allergies, difficulty absorbing the nutrients out of the food or a diet that is simply lacking in some way can cause Pica. Find a holistic veterinarian that places emphasis on using nutrition to resolve medical problems to council you on the best diet and supplements for your dog.

A Lack of Mental or Physical Exercise

Dogs are bright intelligent creatures that need both mental and physical exercise to behave appropriately in human society.

When they do not receive adequate mental and physical exercise they relieve their boredom and may expend the pent up energy through chewing and consuming inappropriate items. To avoid problems of boredom and excess energy rotate toys and chew items at least once a day. Offer chew items for 30 minutes at a time, but offer them multiple times a day. Increased stimulation will be provided if you feed all meals out of food toys instead of out of a bowl. In addition, play with your dog at least twice a day and make sure your dog goes on outings on a regular basis.

Anxiety and compulsive Disorder

Some animals attempt to relieve anxiety and stress by chewing and consuming items that have no nutritional quality. To successfully address this issue the cause of the underlying stress will need to be discovered and addressed. If the dog has separation anxiety the treatment would be different than if the dog has and issue with another animal that lives within the house. Professional help with training and possibly medication prescribed by a veterinarian in addition to addressing the cause of the anxiety or compulsion may be necessary to successfully resolve this issue.

Learned

A lot of Pica issues are simply learned at an early age. A puppy exhibits normal, healthy but unwanted investigation behaviors with their mouth and an owner runs over and snatches prized items away from the dog. Many dogs learn the only way to keep greedy owners from stealing things from them is to swallow the item.

To avoid this problem or to change an already learned behavior around, do training set up in which the dog has something safe (to big to swallow in its mouth) and teach the dog that dropping the items on command is a good thing and it will be followed by treats and play.

In The Meantime

In the meantime, the more we can keep dogs from swallowing non-food items, the safer the dog will be. Some people will use a muzzle at times in which the dog is likely to swallow stuff. Other people will doggie proof the environment to keep the dog safe. Most owners find the best approach to this problem is to immediately address it through a multi-pronged approach of veterinary counsel, increasing physical and mental exercise, training and doggie proofing the environment.

References

Kristin Trott, Tiffany Snell,
www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vmth/small_animal/behavior
or