

Caring for Your Sick Dog

The following information is intended only as a general guideline for the care of a dog already under veterinary treatment. If your dog is ill you should always contact your vet first.

Vomiting and diarrhoea

This is a common minor problem, and can follow changes of diet, scavenging and feeding left over food. Changing to a new food should be done gradually. Take at least three days, and start by adding small amounts of the new diet to the current one. Avoid giving “left-overs” — this can trigger serious problems, such as pancreatitis (inflamed digestive gland). Try to prevent your dog from scavenging by keeping your rubbish secure and if necessary using a muzzle when your dog is in the park. Bones should never be given. Bowel irritation from chewed up bone fragments can cause gastrointestinal upsets and blockages.



Vomiting

Vomiting usually means a tummy upset but can also be a sign of other illnesses. If your dog has been vomiting frequently or seems weak and lethargic, always contact your vet. For adult pets that remain bright and keen to eat, you can follow the advice below. However, if vomiting persists more than a day or your dog seems unwell, contact the vet.

Do not let your dog drink too much at once. Drinking lots of water tends to result in further vomiting with the risk of dehydration. Give cooled, boiled water little and often. Do not feed until at least 12 hours after the last episode, then offer small amounts of a white meat diet such as boiled chicken or boiled fish (cod or coley), with white rice. Provided there is no further vomiting, offer small amounts every two hours for the first day and then larger quantities less often, for the next couple of days. If all remains well, start to mix in the usual diet.

Diarrhoea

Do not feed for 12 hours, but allow access to water, then feed a bland diet as described above for vomiting. If diarrhoea persists more than one to two days (depending on the severity) your vet should be consulted.

Important — always consult your vet if you have a puppy with vomiting or diarrhoea.

Invalids

Many elderly dogs develop longstanding conditions, which, at times, may need home nursing. Monitor carefully and, if the bad times are beginning to outweigh the good, consider the options carefully. Discuss with your vet and see separate leaflet (AAP: Euthanasia In Dogs) or contact our Pet Bereavement Support Service. Always notify the vet of any changes in the condition of a pet with a longstanding illness.

Think ahead — have enough medication for holidays and weekends, and ask the vet if you do not understand the instructions. “Give twice a day,” means (roughly) twelve hours apart! If you stop any medication or there are problems, tell the vet right away. Suddenly stopping medication can be dangerous so check with your vet.

Do not expect too much of invalids – changes can be stressful for them. Generally, they are less capable of exercise than healthy dogs. If they have friends (human or animal) to visit, do not allow them to overdo things!

It is particularly important for elderly animals to have access to water, so if your pet is having difficulty walking or standing, ensure the water bowl is positioned for easy access. If your pet is not eating, do not leave uneaten food down. Pick your dog up and offer a small quantity of something different later. Attractive foods include fresh chicken and gravy, ham, pilchards and cat food. Or you can get appetising invalid foods from the vet. Try serving food warm or adding garlic.

Give any animal that is lying down a lot a thick bed in a warm place. If you provide a heater pad, always cover it to prevent burns. Turn animals that cannot move every two hours. Animals on a heater pad should be turned more often, and checked frequently for overheating. If your pet is unable to move for more than 24 hours, discuss the long-term outlook and future quality of life with your vet.

Dogs that cannot stand should be taken out to relieve themselves regularly. You may need to support them – pass a towel or blanket from one side to the other under the tummy and hold both ends over the back like a sling. Check the bottom and belly carefully for soiling from faeces or urine, which can be washed off using a baby shampoo. Rinse and dry – beware of burning if using a hairdryer. Use the lowest setting, and do not hold it too close. It may be easier to clip longhaired dogs, but mind you do not cut the skin. Areas of hairless skin can be protected from irritation by urine with a layer of Vaseline. Try to groom your invalid pet daily as it cheers them up.