Dog Illness Symptoms and Diagnosis

A basic idea about dog illness symptoms may help you in identifying the underlying problem, at an early stage. Read on to know more about dog illness symptoms and diagnosis.

Problems Related to...
Diet
Digestion
Oral Hygiene
Drooling
Respiratory System
Urinary Tract
Skin
Eyes
Ears
Breeds

Scroll below to view one or all of these following areas of concern.

A healthy pet makes for a happy owner. Regular grooming, proper feeding, and adequate exercise can go a long way in keeping your dog healthy. But it is not always possible to protect your dog from contracting an illness and so, the best thing you can do is to keep an eye open for possible signs and symptoms of illness in your dog.

There are many things that can bring about illness in dogs - sudden changes in the weather, exposure to harsh climatic elements, lack of sufficient exercise or lack of enough rest, food that is low in nutrition, contaminated food, exposure to infectious diseases and parasites, failure to give the proper immunization shots, genetic weaknesses, accident, emotional distress, and so on. Some forms of dog illnesses like rabies and leptospirosis are transferable to human beings, as are parasites like ticks, mites, lice, tapeworms, hookworms, etc. So, it's really important to monitor your pet’s health and take proper precautions. In most cases, pet dogs may develop illnesses, despite the precautions.

A basic understanding about the common dog illness symptoms may be of some help in detecting the condition at the earliest. This, in turn, will aid in early diagnosis and treatment. Here is a brief overview about some of the common dog illness symptoms and diagnosis.

Diet

"My dog refuses to eat."
Dogs are moody, and chances are that your pooch is just too bored with the taste of what he/she is being fed, especially if you're repeating meal menus. This isn't a cause for worry if the dog is active otherwise. However, if he/she's refusing food for two days in a row, it's time to take a trip to the vet.

Health problems like diarrhea, constipation, vomiting, bloating, inflammatory bowel disease, urinary tract infections, asthma, kennel cough, worm infestations, etc., are some of the common reasons for loss of appetite in dogs. Refraining from consumption of food may also be an indication of various dog illnesses like cancer, Addison’s disease, dental problems, systemic infections, stress, liver problems, and kidney failure. In some cases, it has been noted that vaccinations may cause temporary loss of appetite.
"My dog's just eating, and eating, and eating."
Some dogs eat in large amounts, as a result of stress, anxiety, or depression; for some others, the sole purpose of overeating is to outrun their fellow mates.

Even some medical conditions can cause this disorder. They include hypothyroidism, diabetes, internal parasites, certain types of infection, etc. It has been noted that the use of certain medication can also cause overeating in dogs. If you feel that your dog is having an overeating disorder, then take it to the vet and get the condition diagnosed and treated. Some dogs may develop the habit of eating so fast that they end up suffering from bloating, indigestion, and vomiting. This eating disorder is called scoffing, which can be controlled by serving small portions of food, more frequently.

"I'm seeing my dog munching on grass."
This behavior is termed as 'pica', an eating disorder that is characterized by consumption of food items that a dog doesn't normally eat. The most common irregular food item that is consumed by dogs is grass. They may also consume paper at times. It has been suggested that dogs do this out of stress or boredom. Another contention is that canines with some sort of nutritional deficiency, resort to eating grass. A fiber-deficient diet is said to be a common reason that drives dogs to eat grass.

If your dog has this problem, try to engage it in physical activities or else, provide him/her with a fiber-rich diet. While, an occasional meal of grass is not necessarily a problem, if you find this to be regular, then consult the vet and find out the cause.

**Digestion**

"My dog can't seem to keep his food down."
Vomiting once in a while may not necessarily indicate any underlying illness in your dog, as these animals are tuned in a manner that their body discard materials that are inedible. They are also found to regurgitate food that gets stuck in the esophagus. Milder causes inducing vomiting include stress, worms, overeating, hasty eating, consumption of inedible materials, eating soon after exercise, motion sickness, etc. However, vomiting in dogs may indicate serious health problems like kidney or liver failure, pancreatitis, parvovirus infection, food allergies, ulcers, gastritis, enterocolitis, cancer, intestinal obstruction, poisoning, distemper, and diabetes.

If vomiting episodes continue for the entire day or if the vomit contains bright red blood or digested blood (looks like coffee grounds), then an immediate visit to the vet is necessary. Medical attention is imperative in case of additional symptoms like diarrhea, bloating, depression, and lethargy or if the dog exhibits projectile vomiting.

"Diarrhea!"

The most common causes of diarrhea in dogs are consumption of inedible materials and food allergies. Other causes include internal parasites, side effects of medication, change in diet, etc. If the loose stool is black and tarry, or if it contains bright red blood, then bleeding in the gastrointestinal tract is suspected. Exposure to toxins like insecticides may result in vomiting as well as diarrhea in dogs. Inflammatory bowel disease, intestinal tumor, kidney failure, liver failure, pancreatic diseases, colonic cancer, ulcer or polyps, etc., are also some of the possible causes of diarrhea. If the symptoms persist for more than a day or is coupled with vomiting, immediate medical attention must be sought.

"My dog's constipated."
Dogs experience constipation when they ingest non-food items like plastic, paper, hair, etc. These tend to
mix with feces to form solid masses, which are hard to pass. Overconsumption of bones can also cause this condition. Physical abnormalities of the anus and rectum, and an enlarged prostate may cause this dog illness. Use of certain medication, surgery, change in diet, intestinal parasites, dysfunctional digestive enzymes, certain types of infections and hypothyroidism are also among the possible causes of canine constipation. Older dogs may develop this problem due to an electrolyte imbalance. Insufficient water intake, lack of fiber in the diet, and lack of exercise may contribute to this problem.Top Oral Hygiene

"What's with my pooch's stinky breath?"
Bad breath or halitosis in dogs can be associated with various health problems. Dental problems are among the foremost reasons. These include tooth decay, tartar buildup, periodontitis, tumor in the mouth, etc.

Among other reasons, problems of the gastrointestinal tract, kidneys, lungs, and liver may also cause bad breath in canines. While dogs with kidney failure may develop a urine-like smell in their breath, a sweet smell may indicate diabetes. If the dog has loss of appetite, vomiting, and yellow-colored corneas, then there are chances that he/she is suffering from a liver problem. Though bad breath may not always indicate a grave health problem, it would be wise to get it diagnosed at the earliest to find out the cause.

"Are there other symptoms of dental problems?"
As a responsible owner, you need to get an oral examination for your dog, every six months. Besides bad breath, watch out for symptoms like increased drooling, red/bleeding gums, yellowing teeth (caused by tartar accumulation), broken or loose teeth, nicks on the tongue, etc. You may even observe blood stains on your dog's chew toys at times. These are symptoms of periodontal disease.

A dog that suddenly refuses to chew on bones or eat dry food, may be suffering from a tooth root abscess. This happens when bacteria enter the tooth cavity due to a broken tooth, or as a result of gum disease. You may observe a slight swelling in the eye which is on the side of the affected tooth, as the infected root is in proximity. Do not confuse this for an eye problem. The most prominent symptom of tooth root abscess is that the dog will refuse food that needs to be bitten into. Top Drooling

"My dog keeps dripping drool."
Drooling is normal in almost all dogs, and it increases at the sight of a treat, or even when they feel anxious or fearful.

However, excessive drooling, or hypersalivation can be an indication of some underlying disease. It could be anything from dental problems, to medical conditions that affect the salivary glands. Some of the common causes for excess drooling in dogs are heat stroke, distemper, tooth abscess, stomatitis, periodontal disease, rabies, pseudorabies, motion sickness, etc. Hypersalivation, accompanied by a sudden change in behavior could be an early symptom of rabies.

Damaged or infected salivary glands may sometimes cause drooling in dogs. In rare cases, these glands may also develop tumors, causing symptoms like drooling.

If your dog appears to be normal otherwise, except for the dripping mouth, it could indicate that a tiny foreign object is lodged in the mouth. Inspect the dog’s mouth and get rid of it, before it gets swallowed.
Respiratory System

"My pet’s not breathing properly."
While panting is a method adopted by dogs to lower body temperature, rapid and labored breathing can be a sign of some underlying medical condition. Even shallow and noisy breathing may indicate some health problems.

Rapid and labored breathing is often associated with dehydration, diabetes, congestive heart failure, heat stroke, poisoning, shock, etc. Shallow breathing may indicate problems of the chest wall, like broken ribs. Wheezing is often a symptom of problems associated with the lungs, trachea, bronchi, and larynx. Noisy breathing is noted in dogs with a blocked nasal passage.

If your dog is having trouble breathing or is drooling too much or is frequently coughing, the signs may point towards some kind of respiratory problem, cardiac problem, or canine filariasis.

"Is coughing normal for dogs?"
Coughing is usually indicative of respiratory problems like chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, and kennel cough. There are other causes for coughing in dogs and they include inhalation of irritants, like fumes, grass, and food particles. Congestive heart failure, tracheal irritation, and collapsing trachea may also cause cough in dogs. Pressure from tight collars is found to be a common cause for cough in dogs. Even tonsillitis, mouth and gum infections, intestinal parasites, allergies, heartworms, lung tumor, etc. can lead to canine cough.

The nature of cough is one of the factors that help in diagnosing the dog illness. For example, kennel cough causes deep, dry and hacking cough, whereas a weak, gagging cough may indicate tonsillitis.

Urinary Tract

"My dog has trouble doing his/her business."
Dogs are often found to have difficulty urinating. They may strain to pass urine or frequently lick the urethral opening. In some cases, the urine may turn bloody, frothy, foul-smelling or cloudy. The most common canine urinary problems are inflammation of the bladder or cystitis, urinary stones, enlarged prostate, urinary tract infections, tumors of the bladder, and urethra. Urinary incontinence is also common in older female dogs. Urinating in large amounts may be an indication of chronic kidney failure. In such cases, the dog may experience gradual loss of appetite, weight loss, vomiting, etc. He/she may also start drinking lots of water.

"Is there anything like drinking too much water?"
There certainly is, so if you notice that your dog is drinking a lot more water than the usual quota, then take him/her to the vet. There are certain medical conditions that may cause this symptom. The vet may order certain diagnostic tests, to rule out diseases like diabetes and Cushing’s disease, liver disease, kidney problems, adrenal gland disease, and cancer of the lymph tissues. In some rare cases, brain tumor may also cause this symptom.
Skin

"My dog has been shedding unusually."

Causes of hair loss tend to vary. Some of them include hormonal fluctuations, hypothyroidism, excess levels of cortisone, high estrogen levels, estrogen deficiency, and growth hormone-responsive alopecia.

Apart from hormonal problems, there can be various other causes that result in hair loss. Patchy hair loss is often seen in case of ringworm infection and demodectic mange. Itchy skin is a symptom of flea bites or allergies. Other non-hormonal conditions that are involved in canine hair loss are seborrhea, vitiligo, pressure sole, nasal solar dermatitis, acanthosis nigricans, etc. Unusual hair loss is an alarming symptom. Please consult a vet at the earliest.

"The coat isn't as lustrous as it used to be."

A dog’s coat is indicative of his health condition, so any anomalies in the appearance of the skin and hair should ring alarm bells. A lusterless coat, skin eruptions, and a tendency to frequently scratch or lick the skin don’t radiate good health - it may be an indication of the presence of parasites like mites and lice, bacterial and yeast infections, allergies, or dermatitis. Skin problems in dogs may cause symptoms like patchy hair loss, scratching, and biting, rash, scabs, lesions, swelling, etc.

Common causes of canine skin problems are mites, ringworm, food allergies, mange, infections, and stress. Skin problems in dogs are extremely unpleasant and often require long and sustained treatments. Some dogs may develop lumps on the body that may be due to abscesses that develop at the site of a puncture wound, bites or hematomas (accumulation of clotted blood beneath skin). Others include venereal tumors, malignant growths or fatty lumps called lipomas.

Eyes

"Eye discharge: How serious is it?"

Discharge from the eyes, squinting, redness or clouding may indicate some sort of injury to the eyes or eye disease. In case of conjunctivitis, the eye discharge could be either watery or pus-like. Other causes include parasitic infections, like ehrlichiosis, Lyme disease, rocky mountain spotted fever, etc. Eye discharge may also be caused by medical conditions like dry eye, hypothyroidism, corneal ulcers, fever, herpes, vision problems, eye tumor, infectious hepatitis, distemper, ectropion, glaucoma, etc. In case of dry eye, the discharge will be sticky, whereas in epiphora, watery discharge can be observed. It has also been noted that certain breeds with flat heads and protruding eyes are prone to develop eye discharge.

With dogs, you’ll always have to face the problem of restricting him/her from scratching the eye, in case of an infection. Talk to the vet about getting a protective collar in order to prevent the infection from aggravating.

Are there other symptoms of eye trouble?

Your dog will exhibit signs of painful eyes by scratching them or twitching. He/she may appear to be squinting, and could turn extra sensitive in well-lit areas.

In older dogs, you may see a thin film over the eyes that makes them look opaque. If your dog isn’t in pain, this usually indicates cataract.

Check for crusty residues on eyelids to detect problems in the eyelids. Eye problems in dogs can aggravate really fast, so you need to be vigilant enough to detect them early, and get them treated.
Ears

"How to deal with ear problems?"
Ear discharge is one of the common canine symptoms that may be indicative of an underlying ear infection. Mites are also a common cause for such discharge. In case of mites, the discharge from the ears will take the appearance of dried coffee grounds. The dog may also scratch the ears and shake the head frequently.

Yellowish-green ear discharge (with or without foul smell) may indicate bacterial infection, whereas a brownish discharge with a pungent smell could be due to fungal infection in the ears. In most cases, the dog may experience severe pain and irritation.

If you own a dog with furry, floppy, long ears, do keep these parts clean, as the ears can easily get infected. Some susceptible breeds include Beagles, Bloodhounds, and Skye Terriers. If you notice excess ear discharge, along with redness, swelling, and/or foul smell, take your dog to the vet for identifying the symptoms of dog illness and diagnosis.

"How do I detect hearing loss?"
When you notice a pet that does not respond to your calls as he/she used to, it’s a cue to get his/her ears tested. Further, if your dog does not respond to squeaky toys, or other loud sounds, it is a definite indication of a diminished sense of hearing. Of course, this does not imply that your dog has gone deaf, it could be an indication of an inflammation in the outer ear or the middle ear, a narrowed ear canal, or even the presence of a tumor in the area. Remember that a dog’s sense of hearing could diminish with age, just like ours, but you must always make a trip to the vet if you notice symptoms of hearing loss in your dog.

Breed-specific Issues

Aggression...
... that is uncalled-for, indicates that the dog is trying to become your boss. This is normal in most dogs, but make sure that you assume the charge of training your pet, lest he/she gets out of control.
Some susceptible breeds include - Pit Bulls
Rottweilers
German Shepherds
Huskies
Doberman Pinschers

Obesity...
... is an ailment that is common to almost all dogs. As owners, you must refrain from demonstrating your love by overfeeding your pet.
Some susceptible breeds include - Labrador Retrievers
Dachshunds
Beagles
Pugs
Basset Hounds
**Cherry eye...**
...is a condition characterized by the swelling of the third eyelid in many dogs, and needs medical attention.
Some susceptible breeds include - Bulldogs
Beagles
Weimaraners
Neapolitan Mastiffs
Cocker Spaniels

**Hip dysplasia...**
...is a disorder in which the hip socket is malformed. It can lead to arthritis, and the dog could even become crippled. This condition can, at times, be genetic. Larger breeds need to be screened for hip dysplasia.
Some susceptible breeds include - American Pit Bull Terrier
Afghan Hounds
St. Bernards
Shar Peis
Tibetan Mastiffs
Weimaraners
Alaskan Malamutes

**Hypothyroidism...**
...is fairly common in dogs, spayed females, especially. Get your dog checked for thyroid disorders if you observe lethargy and unexplained fluctuations in weight.
Some susceptible breeds include - Dachshunds
Doberman Pinschers
Labrador Retrievers
Shetland Sheepdogs
Dalmatians
Miniature Schnauzers
Spaniels
Terriers

**Bloating...**
...is a serious condition that affects larger breeds. It is characterized by the swelling of the stomach, which traps liquids and gases within. This suffocates the rest of the organs, and can lead to death. Conduct regular stomach screenings for your big dogs.
Some susceptible breeds include - Great Danes
Afghan Hounds
Labrador Retrievers

Though, it is advisable for a pet dog owner to have a basic understanding about the common canine diseases and symptoms, for correct diagnosis and treatment, you have to consult a vet. Such knowledge will help you notice the symptoms at an early stage, so that you can get your pet treated on time.

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