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# Common Threats to Your Dog's Health

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# Common Threats to Your Dog's Health

## **Defining Parvo: What Happens if Your Dog Contracts It**

Parvovirus is a serious viral disease that affects dogs. Parvovirus, which grows rapidly within dividing cells, is found more often in puppies, though it does affect adult dogs as well. Since the largest concentration of rapidly dividing cells is found in the intestinal lining, parvovirus is found in that area of the animal's body. As a result, the dog has diarrhea, which is often bloody, and white blood cells become suppressed. In puppies that are very young, parvovirus can ultimately infect the heart muscle and cause sudden death.

## **Parvo Symptoms**

There are a number of symptoms to look out for when it comes to parvovirus. First of all, the disease makes it impossible for the dog to absorb liquids and nutrients. As a result, the dog will have diarrhea and may also experience lethargy and vomiting. Most dogs also stop eating and have particularly foul smelling and bloody, liquid stool.

In its early stages, dogs with parvo often have a high fever, loss of appetite, and depression. The other symptoms, such as diarrhea and vomiting, occur as a result of the severe distress on the gastrointestinal system. Shock, dehydration, and death are the next stage. Sadly, the attack on the dog's heart and subsequent congestive heart failure can occur months or years after the dog seems to have recovered from the virus. In addition, puppies who survive the disease often remain a bit unhealthy their entire lives.

## **Vaccinating Against Parvovirus**

Parvovirus is difficult to vaccinate against in puppies. This is because the natural antibodies the puppy receives from its mother can interfere with a vaccination. Therefore, most vets recommend vaccinating against parvovirus after the puppy reaches 6 weeks old. From this point on, it should be vaccinated every three to four weeks until it is 16 or 20 weeks old. Although there is reason to believe the vaccine provides lifelong immunity once it does take hold in the animal's body, most vets recommend getting a vaccination every year.

## **Transmitting Parvovirus**

Adult dogs can be carriers of parvovirus without showing any symptoms of the disease. In addition, some dogs with parvovirus shed the virus when they excrete diarrhea. This virus can remain in the environment for nine months or longer, making it easy for other dogs who enter the area to catch the virus because it is highly contagious to dogs that have not been vaccinated. In addition, most disinfectants do not kill the virus.

When a dog does get exposed to parvovirus, it usually takes anywhere from seven to ten days for it to begin showing symptoms of the illness. Parvovirus is not an airborne virus, but a dog can easily contract it if it steps in the fecal matter excreted by an infected dog. Since

parvovirus is so hardy, it can easily be brought into your home and infect your dog by being stuck to your shoes or even your car tires. Since it can live for such a long time outside of the dog's body and is capable of withstanding wide temperature fluctuations, the only way to really get rid of the virus is to clean the affected area with a chlorine bleach and water mixture of one ounce bleach to one quart water.

## **Treating Parvovirus**

If your dog contracts parvovirus, it will require intense treatment. Otherwise, it will die as the result of dehydration. Usually, the treatment includes the use of an IV or subcutaneous fluids and antibiotics. Like all viruses, parvovirus cannot actually be cured. All the veterinarian can do is treat the symptoms and wait for the virus to run its course. The main objective is to keep the dog hydrated and to prevent the loss of proteins. In addition, the vet will work to control the dog's body temperature and will monitor its electrolyte levels. In many cases, it is necessary to give the dog a blood transfusion. Dogs who have suffered from parvovirus can get the illness again at a later time.

Sadly, some puppies infected with parvovirus will still die from the illness, even if they do receive prompt treatment. Most figures, however, estimate that approximately 80% of puppies infected with the disease do ultimately survive if provided treatment. On the other hand, approximately 80% will die if they do not receive the proper care.

## **Do Doggies Mourn? Tips to Handling Possible Depression in Your Dog**

Have you ever left for a vacation and upon your return an unhappy mutt greeted you? You took every precaution to make sure your canine companion was in the loving care of a friend, family member, or reputable kennel, but when you pick him up, he may give you the cold doggie shoulder. Conversely, he may be ecstatic to see you, but won't touch his food when you are at home. He may even suffer from anxiety when you just go outside with the trash.

A varied form of canine depression may be observed after the death of a loved one – either canine or human. Perhaps he has stopped eating and is only drinking a little bit of water occasionally, and the prospect of a walk is leaving him cold. In some cases, your dog may actually whine silently yet persistently. It is hard to deal with mourning doggies, but there are some things you can do to ease your canine companion's suffering.

Before you do anything else, make sure that there is no physical ailment that is causing your dog's change in behavior. If a dog stops eating, for example, you will need to make sure that there is no illness from which he is suffering. The veterinarian should be able to perform some simple tests to rule out any physiological cause for the dog's change in behavior.

If your dog is healthy but sad, you may want to think about the things he enjoys most. Perhaps he always likes to walk at the special dog beach? Or maybe his favorite pastime is a ride in the car with the windows rolled down and his ears flopping in the breeze? Now is a good time to take him to do these things he enjoys. Additionally, you will also want to increase his activity level and take him out more. Exercise can work wonders in a depressed dog, and he

may bounce back quickly. Of course, none of these are cure-alls and it is still possible that none of these ideas will work.

At that point you want to make sure you shower your dog with love and understanding. Do not discipline him for his behavior and do not yell at him in your own frustration. It is easy to just tell him to snap out of it, but if you will remember your own times of the blues, someone telling you to snap out of it does precious little good. As a matter of fact, it only makes things worse, because if the dog senses your irritation with him, he may quite possibly begin to avoid you.

If your dog is missing another dog, perhaps you had another dog living with you who has since passed on, or because of the split in a household the other dog moved away, you could try to make “play dates” with other dog owners and have the dogs interact. Additionally, you may wish to consider adding another dog to your household.

If all else fails, there is the mode of medication. Believe it or not, but there are antidepressants for doggies and your veterinarian will be able to prescribe something that will most likely work for your pooch. While these medications are not a cure-all, they do provide some help in alleviating the chemical imbalances in the dog's brain that cause the behaviors. If you wish to eschew medication as long as possible, you could also get a referral to an animal behaviorist who will be able to ascertain the exact causes of your dog's depression and work with you on a behavior modification plan to readjust him.

As you can see, doggie depression is a very real illness that can affect your canine companion. Probably the worst thing you can do is to ignore it and leave him be. He will not get any better, and a poor intake of food may lead to a whole host of other health related issues that will need to be addressed. The very best thing to do is to get him checked out by a vet immediately to rule out any physical ailments.

### **Doggie Arthritis: Typical Treatments for Your Pooch**

As your dog ages, you might notice him slowing down. It might be harder for him to get up in the morning, he might walk slower, or he might not be as interested in chasing the ball as he used to be. Just as with elderly people, elderly dogs suffer from a myriad of ailments. One of these is arthritis.

Arthritis can show in dogs in many different ways. As in humans, arthritis attacks the joints in the body, making it increasingly difficult to move and get around. Because of evolution, many dogs will try to mask their pain. In the wild, dogs that could not keep up with the pack would be ostracized. This can make it more difficult for the human pack to know when their friend is suffering. Watch for a decline in everyday activities – is your dog slowing on your daily walks? Maybe he is less likely to play fetch or run around the yard? Or maybe he is having a hard time getting up from a laying down position? Other dogs will actually cry and whimper in pain.

The first thing to do is take your dog to the vet for an evaluation. Your vet will check for painful places and range of motion. She might do x-rays. She might also do some blood work to check out your dog's internal workings to make sure that any medication will not have an adverse affect on your pet.

One form of treatment is pain reduction. This can be done with injections at the vet or by pills that you can take home. Only give your pet prescribed pain relievers – never give him something intended for humans as it could make him very ill. Most vets will only use pain medications for short amounts of time before requiring repeat blood work. One side effect of some pain medications is liver and kidney problems and they will want to make sure that their cure is not making your dog worse in other areas.

Another option for dogs is to take glucosamine. As in humans, glucosamine helps relieve arthritis symptoms by replacing joint fluid. Many dogs see an improvement while on the supplement. Your vet can let you know a recommended starting dose for your dog, which is usually used for a minimum of 6 weeks. After that time you can try lowering the dosage or the frequency until you find a good maintenance level for your pet. It comes in both tablet and liquid form, making it easy to find a way to administer it to your pet.

Acupuncture is another treatment for dogs with arthritis. Just as in humans, acupuncture needles are inserted into the dog's body. A treatment session lasts anywhere from one minute to 30 minutes, and usually several treatments are required in order to see improvement.

Another treatment often used in conjunction with one of the above treatments is to use diet and herbs to treat arthritis. More often done by a holistic vet than your regular one, the dog is given fresh foods like salmon, lima beans, and kale as well as a mix of Chinese herbs. This treatment is not for the faint of heart, as it not only requires cooking for your dog, but herbs often need to be given at multiple times of the day to be effective.

Small changes to your dog's every day life can also make coping with arthritis easier. Make sure that he has a soft comfortable bed to sleep in that is easy to get in and out with. Continue with light exercise to help keep his joints mobile.

Make sure that he is maintaining his proper weight, as an excessive weight gain will cause more strain on his joints. This may require a change in the amount of food or the type of food that you give him. You can also look for ways to make it easier for your dog to get around, such as installing a ramp to get up your front stairs or into the car.

Arthritis does not have to mean the end of the road for your pet. With a little extra care and some changes in routine he can be happy and comfortable for years to come.

## **Doggie Diarrhea: The Top Reasons That Can Cause this Problem in Your Pet**

If your pet is dealing with doggie diarrhea, there are a number of possible culprits. The cause of the diarrhea can have a lot to do with how you help your canine friend cope with its problem.

## **Virus**

Perhaps the most common cause of doggie diarrhea is viral, particularly in puppies. Distemper and parvo are the two biggest viral causes of diarrhea. Keeping your pet up to date on its vaccinations is the first line of defense in preventing your pet from suffering from diarrhea. In fact, viral diarrhea occurs most often in puppies that have not been vaccinated. Of course, older dogs that have been vaccinated can still experience this problem. When selecting a vaccine, it is important to select a better and newer vaccine in order to ensure your pet is protected as much as possible.

## **Bacteria**

Bacterial problems can also lead to diarrhea. Dogs take in large amounts of bacteria every day, and it is little surprise. After all, they eat rancid garbage, chew on road kill, lick everything they see, groom themselves with their tongues, and drink out of puddles. Most pets fend these bacteria off just fine. A dog that is on a poor diet, has parasites, has recently undergone stress from surgery or pregnancy, or is otherwise in poor health, bacteria can lead to diarrhea. This is because the harmful bacteria is able to make it past the acids in the stomach, which are your dogs first line of defense, as well as the "good" bacteria found naturally in the stomach.

Bacteria such as clostridium, e-coli, and salmonella can all lead to bacterial diarrhea. Pets can also get food poisoning from these bacteria and be struck with diarrhea. They can also get bacterial infections from infected gums or problems that inflame the bowels. Inappropriate long-term antibiotic use can also make your dog more susceptible to bacterial diarrhea.

## **Parasites**

Diarrhea from parasites is a common problem throughout the world, but it is not common in pets that receive proper veterinary care. Nonetheless, all of the current parasite control products still do not completely prevent pets from experiencing diarrhea from protozoa, intestinal worms, amoebas, and other types of parasites. Similar to bacteria, parasites are all around your pet. A weakened immune system makes your pet more likely to experience diarrhea and other problems from parasites.

## **Garbage**

Your dog getting into the garbage can also cause diarrhea. Dogs have a tendency to eat all sorts of things they shouldn't be eating, such as leaves, sticks, toys, clothes, balls, plastic wrap, and spicy table scraps. If your pet is experiencing diarrhea from gastro-intestinal irritation from eating something inappropriate, your veterinarian might suggest giving your pet a mineral oil based laxative to help clear out the bowels.

## **Metabolic or Organ Diseases**

Your dog's body has a number of different systems that are all tied together. Diarrhea can be a symptom of serious diseases, including pancreatitis, liver disease, hormone imbalances, and kidney disease. Pets in their middle age and older pets are particularly concerning when they

have diarrhea, as the likelihood of it being a problem with one of the body systems is increased. In order to rule out these diseases, your pet will require blood work.

## **Diet**

Your pet's diet can also cause diarrhea to occur. Food allergies, for example, are a common food-related cause of diarrhea. In addition, your pet might need to switch to food that is more digestible. Once your veterinarian has ruled out all other possible causes of the diarrhea, he or she might recommend a special diet to help control the diarrhea.

## **Hair**

Dogs can sometimes excessively lick themselves and swallow too much of their hair. Hair does not digest easily and ferments in the lower bowel. This causes irritation in your dog's colon, which then causes diarrhea. To help your pet with this problem, you can help reduce your pet's shedding. This can require improving your pet's diet, helping it with allergies, or grooming it more frequently.

## **Other Causes**

Other causes of diarrhea include chronic diseases such as lymphoma, cancer, and chronic bowel disease. Stress and anxiety, pancreatic insufficiency, and fungal problems can also cause diarrhea, as can side effects from some medications.

## **Ear Issues: What That Head Shaking and Ear Flapping Mutt is Trying to Tell You**

When it comes to understanding ear issues in your dog, it is helpful to first gain an understanding of your canine pal's ears. Understanding the structure of the ear will help you to better recognize problems and treat them when necessary.

### **The External Dog Ear**

A dog's ear has three parts: external, middle, and internal. The external ear is what you see when you look at your dog. Different breeds of dogs have different shapes, positions, and carriages when it comes to their external ear. The external ear carriage can be erect, pricked, or semi-dropped, which is determined by the muscle that is attached to the base of the ear.

The position, which is often referred to as the "ear set" can be high, low, close, or wide. High ears are ones that are based above the eyes, low ears are located below the eye, close ears are near each other on the skull, and wide ears are further apart.

The shape of the external dog ear can be either tulip, rose, bat, v-shaped, heart-shaped, or triangular. The tulip shape is upright with curved edges and the rose ear is folded back. The bat ear is blunt with rounded tips, while the v-shaped ear is triangular. Heart-shaped ears are

wider in the area near to the dog's head and triangular are similar to v-shaped, except they are smaller.

One fairly common problem that affects the external ear of dogs is ear mites, which are small spider-like creatures that live on or just under the surface of the ear's skin. The type of ear mite that affects dogs is *Otodectes*. This ear mite is easily transmitted from one dog to another. Although ear mites are more commonly found in younger or abandoned pets, older pets can get them as well.

Ear mites are easy to recognize because you will notice a dry and black discharge, similar to coffee grounds, in your pet's external ear. Earwax, blood, inflammatory biochemicals, and the actual ear mites cause this. In addition to looking unpleasant, it can have a bad odor as well. In an attempt to get rid of the ear mites and to satisfy its discomfort, you might notice your dog shake its head or even paw at its ears if it has ear mites.

It is important to treat ear mites for several reasons. First, it can lead to serious skin disease if left untreated. Second, it can be very painful and troublesome for your pet. There are many different types of over-the-counter eardrops that can be purchased to kill off ear mites. It is important to follow the directions carefully and to use the eardrops for the recommended length of time in order to completely destroy the ear mite's life cycle.

The outer ear can become infected in other ways, as well. Yeast, bacteria, foreign bodies, and even lake water can cause an outer ear infection. If the infection is not cared for, it can move into the middle ear and cause the eardrum to become porous.

### **The Middle Dog Ear**

The middle ear of the dog is filled with air and includes the tympanic membrane, or eardrum. The eardrum vibrates in response to sound through the help of the pars flaccida and pars tensa, which make up the eardrum. When your dog has an ear infection, the veterinarian can tell by looking at the pars flaccida because it bulges when it becomes filled with fluid in response to an infection.

In order to relieve the pressure on your dog's middle ear when it has an infection, the veterinarian may choose to stick a tube into the pars tensa, which is translucent. Through the translucent, the veterinarian is capable of seeing the hammer (malleus), anvil (incus), and stirrup (stapes). These tiny bones work together to transmit sound from the middle ear to the inner ear.

### **The Inner Dog Ear**

The inner ear of the dog is filled with fluid. Here, sounds are changed from airwaves to nerve impulses. This part is located on the temporal bone and includes nerves, which help the dog hear and maintain its balance. The nerves interact with special hairs, which are located on the Organ of Corti. In addition, the 8th Cranial Nerve, which carries sound and balance information, is located in the inner ear.

The importance of the inner ear when it comes to balance is the reason why your pet may seem disoriented, confused, or out of balance when it has an ear infection.

## **Harmful Heartworms: Treating Your Dog for This Terrible Threat**

If you have a dog, you might have heard about the parasite heartworms. A potentially life-threatening parasite these worms are responsible for several dog deaths every year. Here is what you can do to prevent them.

It is important to understand how heartworms are spread, as they are a risk to all dogs. A mosquito bites an infected dog, picking up the heartworm eggs in the blood. These eggs hatch and mature into larvae while in the mosquito. The next time the mosquito feeds; these larvae are passed into the new dog's blood stream. Once in a new host, the worms mature and make their way to the right side of the heart and pulmonary arteries.

There they breed, releasing their offspring back into the bloodstream to be picked up by the next errant mosquito. Since mosquitoes are the main transmitter from one dog to another, dogs are most at risk during the summer months. However, in the southern regions where there is little or no winter heartworm can be picked up year round.

To test for heartworm, all you have to do is take your dog into the vet for a small blood draw. This is recommended to be done every 6 months, as this is how long it takes for the worms to fully mature. The blood test only tests for the antibodies that the adult worms produce, so if it is a new infection it might not be picked up until a second blood test.

Even if your dog is on heartworm preventative they should be checked, as no preventative is 100% effective all of the time. In the case of a positive test, your vet may order additional blood work to see how progressed the infection is. They also may order an x-ray or an ultrasound of your dog's heart to check for the presence of adult worms. Heartworms might also be discovered if your dog develops an irregular heartbeat or has an irregular EKG.

Treatment of an active heartworm infection can be dangerous for the dog. The dog is brought into the vet where it is injected with a poison to kill the worms. The dog must then be monitored over several days. In some cases repeat injections maybe necessary. The biggest concern with heartworm is that if all of the worms die and release from the heart at once they can clog the arteries and cause the dog to go into cardiac arrest. Other dogs experience reactions to the medication.

Therefore, the best treatment of heartworm infection is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. Heartworm preventatives are available with a prescription from your veterinarian. Most vets will require a heartworm test prior to dispensing medications. Medications are available in a once a month treatment, either as a pill or topical application. The pill form is often flavored to taste like a treat, so it is easy to give as a treat or mix in food. Remember to keep all medications out of reach of your dog (and children) to prevent accidental overdose.

What most people do not realize is that heartworm preventatives are actually mini heartworm treatments. When you give your dog a treatment, it kills off any larvae that the dog has been exposed to over the past month before they have the opportunity to mature and move into the heart.

Because of this, it is generally recommended to have your dog on heartworm preventative year round. Many oral heartworm preventatives, like Heartguard or Interceptor also have the added bonus of treating several different intestinal parasites that your dog might have come in contact with over the last month as well.

Another way to help prevent heartworm is to reduce the number of carriers. If you live in an area with many mosquitoes, have your yard sprayed regularly. Do not leave containers of water sitting around, as these make prime breeding grounds. If you have a pond on your property, consider treating it with a mosquito poison or installing a pump to circulate water. Steer clear of marshy or swampy areas when out walking at these make ideal mosquito breeding grounds.

A little prevention goes a long way, so remember to protect your pet against heartworm this summer. You both will be happier for it.

### **Helpful Hints for Tick-Proofing Your Pet Pal**

If you live anywhere near a wooded area or tall grass and take your dog to walk there, or if you spend a lot of time outdoors in general, you might be concerned about ticks. Not only can they make you and your dog uncomfortable, they run the risk of spreading dangerous diseases to all the members of your family. Here are some ways to help prevent bringing any little hitchhikers home with you.

Be aware if ticks are in your area. If you have seen one, chances are that there are more hiding. A dog's thick coat makes it an ideal home for ticks. Always check your dog after a walk in an area where there might be ticks. Ticks can be as small as a sesame seed prior to a feeding, but can quickly grow to several times their original size.

Ticks will most frequently attach themselves to your pet's face, ears, legs, paws, chest, and abdomen, so pay careful attention to these areas. If it is an all day excursion, check several times throughout the day. Try to stay on the beaten path while out walking and avoid thick underbrush.

When at home, make sure that grass and weeds are kept cut and are not overgrown. Treat outdoor areas that your pet frequents with a pesticide that kills ticks. Ticks love thick, damp underbrush as a home.

It is also helpful to have your dog on some form of tick preventative. This can be in the form of a topical treatment put on once a month or a dip or shampoo that is used more frequently. Check with your veterinarian for the best treatment option for your pet. Always read warnings and directions on label carefully before applying. Do not apply topical products one after

another as you might over dose your pet. For example, do not use a topical treatment immediately after a dip – allow for at least 48 hours in between.

If you are concerned about using pesticides, there are also alternative therapies available to repel ticks. These include garlic tablets, herbal shampoos, or oils that are applied to your pet that makes him less appetizing to the ticks. These may not be as effective as their chemical counterparts, so make sure that you continue to check your pet frequently for stray ticks.

If you spend a lot of time in tick-prone areas, talk to your vet about getting a Lyme disease or other tick vaccination to help protect your pet.

If you do find a tick on your pet, it is important to remove it as soon as possible. While ticks are small and hard to find initially, they can swell to the size of a pea or larger after a blood meal. Wearing gloves and using a pair of fine-pointed tweezers, grasp the tick by its head or mouthparts as close to your pet's skin as possible. You might need a second person to help restrain your dog or part his hair while you do this.

Pull firmly outward until the tick is removed – being absolutely certain that you removed the head as well. Kill the tick by putting it in a vial of alcohol. Label the jar with the date and the area you were in when you got the tick and take it to the veterinarian. She can then determine what kind of tick it was and what treatments might be necessary. Do not use petroleum jelly, matches, alcohol, or other irritants to remove the tick – these will only initiate a response to grab on harder and release more toxins. After removing the tick, disinfect the entire bite site with alcohol.

If you see ticks on your dog, watch for symptoms of a more serious disease. If anything out of the ordinary seems to be going, contact your veterinarian immediately. Symptoms of tick-borne diseases include lethargy, appetite loss, weakness, pale gums, fever, lameness, vomiting, and even paralysis. However, these are also symptoms of various other diseases, and only your veterinarian can make the determination whether it was from the ticks or not. If you see any symptoms, get your dog to the vet as soon as possible – the sooner the diagnosis the more effective treatment will be.

Keeping an eye out for ticks on your dog will keep both of you healthy and happier and let you enjoy your time together outdoors.

## **Human Food: The Most Likely Culprits That Will Make Your Mutt Sick as a Dog**

Anyone who has ever shared a dining experience with a dog knows that this may be a time when human resolve is tried the hardest. Some dogs will beg with all they have, while others will lie quietly at the side of the table with not so much a whimper, but those expressive eyes and ears say it all. Whether your dog whines, pleads with his eyes, or simply turns into the cutest thing wrapped in fur that you have ever seen, the resolve that dogs should only eat dog food is very often thrown overboard at the dinner table.

While it is generally held that dogs are carnivorous, they may actually more precisely fall into the omnivorous classifications since they do not need meat in order to survive, such as their feline counterparts do. Dogs can actually survive well on alternate protein sources and also grains as well as plant foods if meat is scarce. This should not encourage you to scrap your dog's commercially blended dog food and instead cook your own for her or him. As a matter of fact, human food can make your mutt as sick as, well, as a dog!

Did you know, for instance, that onions are toxic to your dog? Ingestion of onions may result in Heinz body anemia, a condition recognized by veterinarians as the premature death and rupture of red blood cells, thus leaving the dog deficient and anemic. This illness is especially insidious since it may result from the ingestion of raw, cooked, freeze dried, or any other form of onion product.

Considering how many products manufactured for human consumption actually contain dehydrated onions or onion powder, a dog that is fed from the table is likely to have onion introduced to her/his system. If the exposure is cumulative, the bone marrow may very well not have enough time to regenerate the red blood cells that are lost and a serious case of anemia might necessitate a visit to the veterinarian.

Another innocent looking food that may hasten your canine companion's untimely demise is grapes. Yes, grapes are a deadly poison to your dog. The same is true for raisins. While veterinarians are still uncertain as to what exactly causes the reaction in dogs, the symptoms are repetitive.

At first vomiting occurs within a few hours of ingestion of the grapes or raisins, thereafter the dog becomes lethargic and shows all the signs of abdominal pain; when veterinary care is sought, blood tests reveal that the calcium level in the blood is dangerously elevated, as are other substances that indicate that kidney functions are severely impaired; as the illness progresses, complete renal failure finally kills the little dog.

Of course, most everyone is familiar with that great no-no in the dog-human interaction called chocolate. Chocolate contains a chemical named theobromine, which is a pleasant stimulant to humans, but to a dog it packs a serious punch to the canine central nervous system and heart muscle. You will be able to tell that your dog is in trouble soon after she or he ingests some chocolate because odds are that there will be copious vomiting and diarrhea.

Additionally, the dog will appear to be hyper, its muscles twitching uncontrollably, and its heart rate skyrocketing. In extreme cases, or in cases of a high dose of ingested chocolate, a dog may suffer from seizures, coma or death.

Probably a surprising culprit in canine sickness is the highly favored treat of the macadamia nut. It does not appear that other animals are affected by this delicacy the way that dogs are. Depending on the amount of nuts that the dog has eaten, within about a half day or less, you will be able to notice unusual lethargy, sometimes accompanied by vomiting, and an overall muscle weakness with accompanying muscle tremors.

Thereafter your dog will quite possibly not be able to stand or walk without your help for about another day or two. Fortunately, the effects of these nuts wear off and soon your canine companion should be back to her or his former self.

As you can see, it is best to resist the temptation to feed “just a bit” to your begging dinner guest. In the long run, he will thank you!

## **Icky Diseases Your Beloved Dog Can Pass on to You**

Although uncommon, one scary reality of dog ownership is the fact that there are certain diseases that your beloved pet can pass on to you. Diseases that are capable of being passed on to a human from a dog are called zoonotic diseases.

### **Talking to the Vet**

The primary line of defense against zoonotic diseases is the veterinarian. If your dog becomes ill and you seek medical treatment from your veterinarian, he or she has the responsibility of informing you that the disease is zoonotic. In addition, he or she should give you advice in order to prevent the disease from spreading from your dog to you. At the same time, the veterinarian cannot legally diagnosis a disease that you may have acquired from your pet. Similarly, he or she cannot help treat the disease in a human. If you suspect the disease may have spread to you, it is imperative for you to contact a physician right away.

### **Types of Zoonotic Diseases**

The history of zoonotic diseases is lengthy. Both the Bible and ancient Greek recordings mention the Plague, one of the deadliest zoonotic diseases man has ever encountered. Today, a number of zoonotic diseases remain. They include:

Rabies: Rabies is a disease that infects the nervous system. It is transmitted from one mammal to the other through saliva, with the most common method of transmission being from a bite. If preventative measures are not taken after being bit by an animal with rabies, death will result. All mammals can carry rabies. Wild animals most commonly infected with rabies include raccoons and bats. The best line of defense against rabies is to keep your dog up-to-date on its rabies vaccination.

Lyme Disease: Lyme disease is transmitted through the bite of a deer tick. If the bacteria causing Lyme disease is not eradicated from the body, it will establish itself in the body tissue and potentially cause a number of symptoms. Some symptoms include pain and damage to the joints, the nervous system, and organ systems.

Lyme disease is most common in the northeast and upper-midwest in the United States. While your dog cannot directly transmit Lyme disease to you, it can bring infected ticks home to you. Therefore, it is important to maintain proper tick control on your pet to ensure you both remain healthy.

Ringworm: Ringworm is a contagious fungus. It is most commonly found on the scalp, the body, the nails, the feet, and the groin area. It can be easily spread from a pet to a human by touching the infected area on your pet. The red ring on the skin usually makes it easy to identify ringworm. It can also be spread if the infected area on your dog rubs against a surface, such as bed linens, clothing, or furniture, and you later touch the object. To prevent catching ringworm, be sure to treat your dog immediately after noticing the ringworm infection and keep the area covered.

Cryptosporidiosis: Cryptosporidiosis is caused by parasites and causes diarrhea. After infecting your dog's body, the parasite lives in the intestine and gets passed out in the stool. It has a protective outer shell, allowing it to survive outside of the body for a period of time. It is also resistant to chlorine-based disinfectants and can be passed on to humans through contact. It can also be found in water, such as in a pond or pool that you share with your dog.

### **Risk Factors**

If you are a pet owner, you are automatically at a higher risk of catching zoonotic diseases than someone without a pet. There are, however, certain factors that make you more susceptible to catching one of these diseases. Infants and small children, for example, are more prone to catching zoonotic diseases because their immune system is immature and because they have poorer hygiene habits.

Pregnant women and the elderly are also at a higher risk because their immune systems are not as strong. Similarly, those with HIV/AIDS or who are undergoing cancer therapy are at a greater risk because their immune systems have been compromised.

Although the chances of catching a zoonotic disease from your pet is rare, it is always best to take necessary precautions. Handle your pet with gloves if it is suffering from a zoonotic disease and be sure to keep a safe distance while still treating your pet

### **Mangy Mutts: Tips on Treating This Skin Condition**

Amongst dog lovers, mange is a feared term and quite often only discussed in whispers. This skin condition is actually the result of a mite infestation. Characterized by hair loss and scaly eruptions on the skin, this mite infestation manifests itself in three forms, each with their own distinct symptoms and treatments have:

First and foremost is the sarcoptic variety. The female mite causes this kind of mange as she damages the dog's skin when burrowing underneath to lay her eggs. The dog itches incessantly and even more so as the eggs hatch and a new batch of female mites begins to burrow underneath the skin to lay eggs. As the number of mites increases, so does the dog's itching, and it is not surprising that he will scratch and bite himself until his skin is raw and bloody.

These open wounds cause sores and give way to other infections that will require antibiotic treatments. In addition to the foregoing, because of the damage the dog will inflict to his or her own skin, it is hard for a veterinarian to actually identify the mite that causes sarcoptic

mange. It is important to note that this kind of mange is highly contagious to other dogs and also their human companions. While in humans this kind of mange will not run its full course, it is nonetheless a rather annoying condition.

If you suspect that your dog is suffering from sarcoptic mange, do not put off the trip to the veterinarian. Your dog is feeling miserable, and needs help quickly! Veterinarians will most likely treat any skin infections with an antibiotic while also administering a mite killer, usually Ivermectin, by injection. In order to give the dog a little bit of comfort, your vet might also give her or him a steroid that will relieve the itch. As a follow up, you will probably want to use medicated shampoos for your dog's regular bath to help the skin's healing.

Another form of mange is the demodectic variety. Usually, this kind is only seen in puppies and will not strike once your dog is a year old. It is thought that the mites that cause this condition are always present on the dog's skin, but at times a lapse in resistance to the mites may cause mange to occur. Symptoms include hair loss around the eyes, nose, and mouth as well as on the front legs.

The obvious patches of hair loss may diagnose advanced cases. Lighter cases may run their course and then symptoms may disappear altogether, while more severe cases will require the intervention of a veterinarian. The application of an insecticide and baths in medicated shampoo will usually take care of your puppy in no time at all.

Last is the cheyletiella mange which again only seems to affect puppies and not grown dogs. The perpetrator of this condition is a mite that is large enough to be seen under a magnifying glass. Its infection causes a kind of rather noticeable dandruff on your puppy and is very contagious. Fortunately, this is the mildest case of mange and self-corrects very shortly.

As you can see, mange comes in a number of distinct varieties that may make it harder to diagnose. Additionally, since mites are hard to find on a dog, especially in the case of sarcoptic mange where the skin is heavily damaged, it sometimes happens that a dog's condition is misdiagnosed. For this reason, it is imperative to visit a veterinarian at the first sign of trouble, when most of the skin is still intact, and your vet will be able to survey the actual mite damage as opposed to the damage your dog's teeth and claws have done in his attempts to find some relief from the intense itching.

In the same vein, if you have a puppy of one of the breeds that is most susceptible to demodectic mange, such as Chihuahuas, German Shepherds, Great Danes, and others, you will need to be especially vigilant at the signs of hair loss and may want to take your puppy in even if you only suspect that she or he is suffering from a mite infestation.

## **Puppy Parasites: The Most Common Parasites and Their Treatments**

Parasites are living organisms that use another organism for survival. As a result, they cause harm to the host organism. Although there are numerous different parasites that can cause harm to your dog, there are three very common parasites that can be controlled through proper care: fleas, ticks, and heartworms.

## **Fleas**

Fleas are nuisance to you and your pet. In fact, an estimated \$1.6 billion is spent each year through groomers in the United States in an attempt to treat flea problems, with an additional \$4 billion spent on over the counter treatments, and \$348 billion on professional flea control.

Once fleas infest your home or your pet, they are hard to get rid of. These tiny creatures are quite strong and capable of jumping great distances, making it difficult to capture and destroy them. In fact, they can pull up to 160,000 times their weight – which is the equivalent of a human pulling 24 million pounds. In addition, they can jump over 150 times their size, which is the same as a human jumping 1,000 feet. The force fleas use to accomplish this is the same as 50 times the acceleration a space shuttle uses when lifting off. Amazingly, a flea is capable of jumping 30,000 times without stopping and, each time it jumps, it reverses its direction.

To get rid of fleas, it is important to break the life cycle. It is not enough to kill only the adult fleas. The eggs and larvae also need to be destroyed. Therefore, if you already have a flea infestation, you need to purchase a product that kills fleas at all stages of the cycle.

Prevention is also key to controlling fleas. There are many options available to pet owners, such as flea collars, oral medication, and spot ons. Flea collars, however, can be bothersome to a dog with sensitive skin and they do not necessarily help protect all of the dog's body. In addition, they do not kill fleas that already exist.

Oral medications also do not kill fleas. They do, however, prevent female fleas from laying eggs that are healthy. This breaks the life cycle and ultimately kills off the fleas. To be effective, these medications need to be given twice per week.

Spot ons are another options. These products are put on the back of the dog's neck and are spread naturally throughout the fur from the natural oils in the dog's coat. Most of these products are effective for about one month.

## **Ticks**

Ticks are a type of arachnid that feeds off of an organism's blood. They are responsible for transmitting numerous diseases to both humans and to dogs. Ticks are commonly found resting at the tip of tall grass. This way, it is easy for them to attach themselves to a passing animal. Unlike fleas, ticks do not jump. After a tick attaches itself to a host, it begins sucking its blood. When it is full, it will drop off on its own, but this can take several days.

Ticks are capable of anchoring themselves firmly to their host. If you attempt to pull one off of your pet, you need to do so carefully. Forcefully pulling out a tick can cause its mouthpiece to be left behind, which can cause infection.

There are several products on the market that can be used to kill ticks and to prevent them from attaching to your dog. Many of these are in combination with flea prevention, such as flea and tick spot-ons. You can also purchase flea and tick dog collars, though they are toxic if your pet eats them.

## **Heartworms**

Heartworms are parasites that attack your dog's heart. While one dog cannot pass heartworms on to another, the parasites can be transmitted from the bite of a mosquito. Therefore, a mosquito that bites one animal with heartworms can give heartworms to another animal.

Fortunately, heartworm medication is available to prevent your pet from getting them. At the same time, you need to be careful to follow the recommended dosing. Giving too much can be dangerous to your pet's health. Some dog breeds, such as Australian shepherds, shelties, and all types of collies, are particularly prone to illness if given too much heartworm medication. In addition, some dogs can be allergic to the chewable heartworm medication. For these pets, it is important to stick with heartworm pills that are meant to be swallowed.

It is important to provide your pet with year-round protection from heartworms. It is, however, ok to provide your pet with heartworm medication from just June to November if you live in a cold winter state. Be sure to contact your veterinarian first, however, before taking your pet off of any type of medication.

## **Signs of Rabies and How to Prevent Doggie Disease**

Rabies is a serious disease that attacks your pet's nervous system. If you fail to treat rabies in your canine friend, it can ultimately cause it to die. Furthermore, rabies is easily spread from one animal to another, including from an animal to a human. Therefore, it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms for the sake of your pet's health, as well as to protect yourself.

### **Rabies: More Serious Than You Might Realize**

Rabies has garnered a great deal of attention from the medical community around the world. In the United States alone, over \$300 million is spent every year toward the prevention and treatment of this serious and highly infectious disease.

Every mammal, including livestock, people, and pets, are susceptible to rabies. While over 90% of rabies are found in wildlife like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes, 8% of rabies cases are in domesticated animals – including dogs. In the United States, Texas has the greatest reported number of rabies cases.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Rabies**

Animals often do not show signs of being sick right away when they become infected with rabies. As time passes, however, the rabies virus has time to travel to the brain via the nerves. When the virus gets to the brain, it becomes inflamed. In addition, the animal's saliva becomes infected with the virus. It is with this infected saliva that the animal passes the virus onto other animals. All it takes is one bite to pass it on.

Once an animal does begin to show symptoms of rabies, it generally experiences a fever, agitation, excitation, and confusion. It might also experience partial paralysis, insomnia, hypersalivation, hallucination, difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia, or a fear of water. Generally, an animal will die within a few days after symptoms of rabies appear.

### **Protecting Your Dog from Rabies**

Sadly, the majority of dogs who get rabies are domesticated animals. What makes this truly tragic is the fact that the disease can be prevented in these animals with a simple vaccination. It is too easy for a pet to get bitten by a wild animal with rabies. Even if you keep your dog inside at all times, accidents happen and pets sometimes get out of the house. During that time, your precious canine friend can be bitten by an animal with rabies and contract this fatal disease. Therefore, it is imperative to always keep your dog up to date on its rabies shots.

Even if your dog has been vaccinated against rabies, it is still helpful to keep it indoors in order to prevent it from contracting rabies. If it does need to go outside, be sure to keep a close eye on it to make sure an animal does not bite it. In addition, if you notice a suspicious stray animal, be sure to call animal control in order to report it. Strays in general are more likely to carry rabies and are less likely to be vaccinated against it.

On the other hand, it is still vitally important to watch out for domesticated animals. In fact, before rabies vaccinations became legally required of pet owners, more than 90% of all reported cases of rabies were in domesticated animals. Although this figure is much less now, there are still cases of domesticated animals carrying the deadly disease. Therefore, you need to be sure to always protect yourself and your pet from acquiring rabies.

### **Treating a Dog with Rabies**

If another animal has bitten your pet, it is generally best to undergo rabies treatment as a precautionary measure. This treatment, however, is quite painful. Therefore, it is helpful to capture the animal if possible in order to test it for rabies before making your pet undergo treatment. Often, the animal will be kept for observation. If it shows no signs of rabies within ten days, any rabies treatment that has been started on your pet can be stopped.

There are a few other factors a veterinarian will consider before deciding to have your pet undergo treatment, such as:

- Was the dog's skin broken or were the mucus membranes contaminated?
- Was the animal that bit your dog domestic or wild?
- Was your dog vaccinated against rabies?
- Is the species of animal that bit your dog likely to be rabid?
- Was the bite provoked or not? Rabid animals are more likely to bite another animal without provocation.

If the veterinarian determines there is a risk or rabies was transmitted to your pet, it will have to undergo a series of painful shots. Although the shots are unpleasant, they are worth it to save your canine friend's life.

## **Thunderstorm Anxieties: What You Can Do to Alleviate your Dog's Fears**

Thunderstorms can be very nerve-wracking for dogs. The high winds and loud noises can be very upsetting. Here are some things that you can do to alleviate your dog's fears.

Always make sure that your dog is inside if inclement weather is imminent. Do not leave dogs outdoors or in doghouses. If bad weather is forecasted for the day, do not risk it staying nice until you get back.

Provide your dog with a safe place to wait out the storm. Many dogs will feel more secure in their kennels than in a big open house, and some dogs will even make a desperate attempt to wedge themselves under furniture or into closets. Some dogs have even been found covering in the bathtub! Get an appropriately sized cage for your dog.

Make sure that it is comfortable with blankets or bedding and has a water source at all times. If the cage is open, you might consider covering it with a blanket or cloth to make it feel more enclosed. Some dogs will start to make this their "den" and use it on their own. If you have a destructive dog, however, and need to be gone you will want to secure them in the cage.

If you are able to be home during the storm, take some time out to sit with your dog. Remember that dogs are very in tune with their owner's emotions. If you are calm and relaxed your dog should pick up that things are okay. Conversely though, if you are worked up and nervous, the dog will become more agitated.

Though it may be difficult, try not to console your dog if he is afraid. By getting positive attention from you, you are doing one of two things: encouraging your dog to continue to act this way because he got positive reinforcement, or confirming to your dog that there was danger and he was correct and acting appropriately.

Some dog owners have had success by playing white noise during thunderstorms. This will work best if your dog is more afraid of the noise than anything else. Other dogs, however, pick up on atmospheric changes, and noise therapy may not be very effective.

In severe cases, you might want to talk to your vet about medications to help your dog's anxieties. A homeopathic remedy or a mild sedative might be prescribed. In order for any medication to have the maximum effect it needs to be given prior to your dog becoming anxious. So it is best to medicate them an hour or so before the storm is supposed to hit. Waiting to administer sedatives until after your pet is worked up can cause them not to work or to even have the opposite effect.

Always remember that a dog's fear is instinctual and not something that they are doing on purpose to get on your nerves. Never hit or punish a dog for being afraid during a storm, it will only cause him to be more fearful the next time around.

To prevent thunderstorm fears, it is important to get started as soon as you realize that there is a problem. Fear will only increase over time, making them more difficult to manage or eliminate.

One popular way of getting dogs to stop fearing thunderstorms is through desensitization training. For this process, you reward your dog for the behavior that you want, much as you would reward him for learning to sit. Get a CD of thunderstorm noises that you can play at home. While you are there, play the CD on a low volume for a short interval – low and short enough that your dog does not become anxious. Reward him for remaining calm.

Next, gradually increase the volume and length. If your dog remains calm, reward him and continue. If he remains anxious, do not reward him, but calm him down and start over. It is essential that these lessons end with your dog feeling relaxed and happy. Repeat lessons daily, increasing the volume and duration, until you reach your desired results. Then you can continue on to include you leaving the room for 30 seconds, one minute, five minutes or more. While this process is lengthy and time consuming, in the end both you and your dog will be much happier.

### **Vested Interest in Your Vet: Choosing the Right Doggie Doctor Makes All the Difference**

Choosing the right vet can make a big difference on how both you and your dog feel about veterinarian care. Here are some tips to help you decide on which doggie doctor is right for you.

Choosing a vet is a lot like choosing a doctor. You are going to want someone who is certified, and has the bedside manner that you prefer. A good place to start looking is to start asking around. Look for other pet owners and ask who they see and why (or who they would not see).

Or you can talk to local animal shelters, breeders, trainers, and boarding facilities to see whom they recommend. Remember that everyone is going to have opinions, so do not count everything as gospel truth when they tell you their stories. But a vet that has a consistently bad reputation is probably one that you do not want to visit.

Next, plan to visit your possible vet. You can do this in two ways – one you could call up or walk in and ask to see a tour of the clinic. Keep in mind that vet clinics are like hospitals and things will get crazy some of the time and it might not be possible to accommodate your request if you just walk in. However, the staff should be willing to show you around the facility. The office staff should be friendly and accommodating.

Once you think you have found the clinic you would like to use, you might want to consider a few additional points.

It is good to know how many vets they have on staff. Having multiple vets will generally make it easier to get an appointment on short notice. It also might mean that you see a different vet each time you go, so you will want to be sure that you are comfortable with all of them.

You might want to know what sort of testing they are able to do onsite. At least basic diagnostic testing should be available. If a vet sends lab work to another company for testing,

inquire about the turnaround time. Ask if they do x-rays, surgery, and ultrasounds on site as well as blood work. If dogs are sent elsewhere for more complicated procedures, make sure you know where that clinic is and if it will suit your style as well.

Since you never know when an emergency will occur, it is helpful to know what your vet recommends after hours or in case of a real emergency. Some vets will have an after hour call line or make house calls, while other will refer you to an emergency center. Depending on how you prefer emergencies to be handled may make or break your new vet.

It is also helpful to find a vet that shares your personal philosophies on pet care. Ask about their feelings on euthanasia and/or breeding. Find out how they perform surgery. Ask opinions on spaying and neutering. If you are looking for services such as declawing or ear cropping, make sure that the vet is willing to perform these.

You will want someone who shares a similar philosophy to yours to make your relationship run smoother. You might also find out what kind of pets your vet owns, as this will give you an idea of your vet's personality, as well. Would you visit a pediatrician with no children?

Inquire about how the staff continues their education. Clinics that are frequently attending seminars and workshops will not only be more up to date on medical advances, but are usually more open to trying alternative treatments as well.

Lastly, find out the vets protocols for daily business. How far ahead do you have to call for an appointment? What do you do if you want to be seen same day? If an unforeseen emergency comes up, such as an emergency surgery, how does the vet handle billing?

With a little research, both you and your dog will find a vet that both of you can feel better about. And remember, nothing is set in stone. If you think you have found the perfect vet that later turns out not to be, you can always look for a new one.

## **Wiggly Worms: Possible Treatment for Your Dog's Tapeworms**

Tapeworms are parasitic flat worms with segmented bodies. The head of most tapeworms consists of suckers or grooves, which enable them to attach themselves to your dog's intestine. Each of the segments of the tapeworm has its own reproductive organs. As a result, the tapeworm continually forms new segments in the neck region and the segments at the end are cast off as the tapeworm ages.

The mature segments of the tapeworm contain multiple eggs and are grouped into packets. Often, these are found near the dog's anus and look like a piece of rice or a cucumber seed. It is the site of these egg packets that leads to the diagnosis of tapeworm in most pets.

### **Types of Tapeworms**

There are several different types of tapeworms that infect dogs, they are: *Dipylidium caninum*, *Taenia* species, *Echinococcus granulosus*, *Diphyllobothrium latum*, and *Spirometra*

mansonoides. The treatment used to get rid of the tapeworm generally depends on the type of tapeworm your dog has.

### Dipylidium Caninum

Dipylidium caninum can cause abdominal discomfort and nervousness in your dog. It may cause your dog to vomit and to even have convulsions, which are thought to be caused by toxins produced by the tapeworm. In addition, the active segments that form around the anal region can cause your pet to excessively lick the area or to scoot its bottom across the floor.

Praziquantel is the most common treatment and is found in products such as Tradedwinds Tapeworm Tabs and Droncit. Your dog's body weight is used to determine the dosage, though the medication cannot be given to a pregnant dog. Epsiprantel, sold under the brand name of Cestex, is another effective treatment but cannot be used on puppies less than seven weeks old. Flea and lice control are the best preventative measures to take to keep your pet from developing this type of tapeworm.

### Taenia Species

There are nine species of Taenia found in North America, with six of them affecting dogs. Dogs infested with a type of Taenia species tapeworm rarely show any signs of infection other than the eggs sacks in the anal region and segments attached to the fur. Taenia species tapeworms are generally treated with antihelmintics, such as Drontal Plus and Cestex. The best way to prevent infection is to keep your dog from eating raw meat and from preying on wild animals.

### Echinococcus Granulosus

Similar to Taenia species, dogs rarely show signs of infection from Echinococcus granulosus, unless there are large numbers of tapeworms present. The eggs are not uniformly passed through the stool and when an egg is found, it is difficult to distinguish from the Taenia species. Treatment usually consists of using Praziquantel. Preventing Echinococcus granulosus includes never feeding your dog raw meat.

### Diphyllbothrium Latum

Diphyllbothrium latum lives in the small intestines of your pet and is most commonly found in the Great Lakes area because it is transmitted through fish. The Diphyllbothrium latum tapeworm grows to be very large, but there are very few signs of infection in dogs. Praziquantel is also used to treat Diphyllbothrium latum, although it still is not FDA approved for this purpose. To prevent your pet from becoming infected with Diphyllbothrium latum, you should not feed it raw or undercooked fish.

### Spirometra Mansonoides

Spirometra Mansonoides most commonly infects felines, though it can also infect dogs. It is most commonly found in the southern United States, particularly in Florida and along the Gulf Coast. There are usually no symptoms of a Spirometra mansonoides infection, though severe cases can cause irritability, weight loss, and change in appetite. Praziquantel is also used to

treat this type of tapeworm. To prevent *Spirometra mansonioides* from infecting your pet, prevent it from eating snakes, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and rodents.

Tapeworms are a serious problem for all animals, including dogs. If left untreated, they can cause a great deal of pain and ultimately death. Since there are so few symptoms associated with many types of tapeworms, it is important to watch your pet closely for signs of infection. This requires keeping an eye on the anal region and on your pet's stool.

In addition, routine visits to your veterinarian and the administration of vaccinations will prevent the problem from developing in your pet. Similarly, if tapeworms do get a hold of your pet, your regularly veterinary visits will ensure the infestation gets caught early and can be eradicated before causing too much harm to your pet.

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