

Why Does My Dog Eat My Socks?

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Any owner of a teething puppy can attest, dogs like to [chew on all sorts of things](#). The act of chewing itself can seem like nothing more than a nuisance, but if your dog happens to swallow anything that he may be chewing on, well, that's another matter entirely. One such item dogs seem to routinely swallow is socks. Although socks aren't on par with ingesting toxic doses of medication or food items, they can certainly be cause for concern were your dog to eat any.

Why Do Dogs Eat Socks?

Dirty socks laying on the floor certainly don't look like an appealing snack option for you or I, but that doesn't stop dogs from thinking so. Dogs like to eat socks for a multitude of reasons. Socks, even ones that have been laundered, can smell a great deal like you and your dog may have their initial interest in your socks piqued because of that. They may start chewing and licking at them and may accidentally swallow them in their play. If your dog sees them as valuable because of their smell, they may even intentionally swallow them as a way to [resource guard](#) them. Of course, some dogs just like to eat things they shouldn't. Pica, a condition where one eats non-food items, isn't just a compulsive behavioral disorder seen in people, dogs can suffer from it, too.¹ There are also metabolic disorders that may cause your dog to want to eat non-food items, such as socks.

What's the Concern With Eating Socks?

Socks may seem benign enough to leave where your dog can access them. We're not talking about [antifreeze](#) or [sugar-free gum](#), here, so what's the issue? Unfortunately, due to both their linear nature and their ability to ball up, socks can easily cause gastrointestinal upset, blockages, and even septicemia and death.² They can become lodged in any part of your dog's GI system, preventing the otherwise normal passage of other gastric materials. As a results, the surrounding tissues can become inflamed. If the blockage isn't removed, the inflamed tissues can even start to necrose (that is, the cells begin to die), which can lead to life-threatening septicemia.²

Of course, not all sock ingestion episodes are equally emergent. A Yorkie that eats even just a baby sock is more concerning than a Great Dane that eats that same baby sock. However, all cases where a dog ingests a sock require close monitoring and immediate veterinary attention. This is especially true if you see vomiting, lack of appetite, or lethargy.³ If your dog ate a sock, don't try to make your dog vomit it back up. Instead, take them to the vet to have them checked out.

Your veterinarian will do a thorough exam, including palpating your dog's belly to check for any tenderness or bloating that can come from gas buildup. From there, your vet will want to take a radiograph of your dog. Contrary to what some may think, soft tissues *can* be seen on X-ray, including food in the stomach, stool in the colon, and any gastric material within the intestines. Your vet will also look for any gas patterns that may indicate a partial or full blockage. If a single X-ray is suspicious for a blockage, your vet may also want to do a barium study. This is where your dog is fed a liquid that shows up on the X-ray as bright white. X-rays are then taken immediately after ingestion and then two, four, six, and sometimes even eight hours later. The high contrast provided by the barium can help pinpoint where, if any, your dog's GI blockage is.

Depending on your dog's symptoms and what the radiographs reveal will dictate a treatment plan. A more conservative treatment plan would involve hospitalization with IV fluid therapy and GI medications. Keeping your dog hydrated with the fluids can help keep your dog's GI system hydrated, which may in turn encourage your dog's intestines to continue passing the sock. If your dog's vet doesn't think that a conservative approach is in the best interest of your dog, they will want to perform either an endoscopy or a exploratory abdominal surgery. These surgical procedures are, unfortunately, the only sure ways to see if an ingested sock has caused an obstruction and also the only way to remove the sock.

How Can I Keep My Dog From Eating Socks?

The first step in preventing your dog from ingesting your socks is to keep them out of reach of your dog. Put laundry away promptly and don't leave dirty socks laying strewn on the floor. Providing more appropriate play and enrichment for your dog can also stave off boredom that might otherwise be filled with sock eating.¹ Interactive toys, puzzle feeders, and activities such as [agility](#), flyball, and field trials can provide your dog with mental stimulation as well.

Another way to prevent your dog from ingesting anything they shouldn't be is by training. Using [positive reinforcement](#) based training methods to teach your dog what "[drop it](#)" and "[leave it](#)" means can be incredibly helpful. If your dog is not quite there with his training, yet, redirect them with another toy to play with. This may get them to drop the sock. Of course, you can also try to physically remove the sock from their mouth, but your dog may think this is a game of keep away, which will make them want to play with socks more.

To us, socks can be dirty and smelly, but the fact remains: dogs like to eat them. Unfortunately, socks can be expensive to deal with if your dog does ingest them. As with most veterinary medical concerns, the best treatment option is prevention.

If you suspect your pet is sick, call your vet immediately. For health-related questions, always consult your veterinarian, as they have examined your pet, know the pet's health history, and can make the

best recommendations for your pet.