



Always consult with a veterinarian that you feel comfortable with before diagnosing or treating any disease on your own. This information is for reference only.

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## Pica

### Issue Description

*Pica is a medical disorder characterized by an appetite for substances largely non-nutritive (e.g., clay, coal, soil, feces, chalk, paper, soap, mucus, ash, gum etc.) or an abnormal appetite for some things that may be considered foods, such as food ingredients (e.g., flour, raw potato, raw rice, starch, ice cubes, salt, blood). In order for these actions to be considered pica, they must persist for more than one month at an age where eating such objects is considered developmentally inappropriate. Because this condition may cause serious harm to your dog, it's important to seek treatment right away.*

### Causes

Pica can be caused by either a medical or behavioral problem. Various digestive disorders may be related to pica, such as difficulty swallowing, or problems related to intestinal absorption. Other problems such as diabetes or a nutrient deficiency may be related as well. If your dog starts eating things he shouldn't, first you should talk to your veterinarian to rule out these medical problems. The veterinarian may want to run blood tests and urinalysis to check for underlying disease and organ function.

Once medical causes have been eliminated, it's time to consider the behavioral reasons for pica. Some dogs are so bored or anxious that they need something to do. Some dogs also will chew on things to get your attention. In fact, scolding your dog may actually reinforce the behavior. If the dog is looking for attention, you give it to him by scolding him. To an attention-starved canine, bad attention is better than no attention.

### Symptoms

- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Bad breath
- Collapsing

### Diagnosis And Treatment

Diseases involving the nervous system such as rabies or neurotoxin exposure may cause pica. Anemia, hypothyroidism, certain diseases of the liver, pancreas and gastrointestinal systems, nutritional problems, and foreign bodies may cause it as well.

Your veterinarian may perform a physical examination, bloodwork (CBC, blood chemistry), and urinalysis to determine if a disease or other physical process is causing the pica. When an underlying disease or disorder is present that causes pica in the affected dog, treatment is directed at the disease process. Ensuring that the diet is appropriate and of good quality will eliminate nutritional deficits as a cause of pica.

When no disease can be found, which is most often the case, pica is considered a behavioral problem. It is often associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Pica may also be caused by boredom. The veterinarian may prescribe antidepressive drugs. The veterinarian may refer some affected dogs to a veterinary behaviorist for consultation.

Other treatment revolves around controlling the dog's environment. The owner should prevent the dog's access to the desired substances or objects. Keeping the dog indoors and walking the dog on a leash will help bar access.

In addition, where practical, covering the substance with an ingredient that the dog dislikes may be helpful.

Compounds such as red pepper sauce or bitter-tasting substances, which are available in pet stores, may discourage dogs from eating inappropriate things.

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