




An Indigestion Question

by Sherry Ballou Hanson



Sock? What sock? I have no idea what you're talking about (burp...).

We have all heard the saying, “Labs will eat anything.” Even the veterinarians say so, and they can prove it when they have to go in and remove that “anything.” So why do Labs do it? We’ll probably never know, but remember that back when the breed was developed for arduous work, the dogs required loads of calories to replace those they burned. It appears they’ve never gotten over it, either. Although how many calories are in some of these items is anyone’s guess.

Bailey was seven years old when he got a bad case of shingles, and I don’t mean the painful rash. Bailey’s owners were having a new roof put on their house, and when owner Lisa happened to walk past a window and look outside, the Lab was “jumping up and down and catching things in his mouth.” As the roofers ripped off old pieces and tossed them down, Bailey would catch them and chew them up. “Hours later, following one of the more expensive trips to the vet,” says Lisa, “the dog was happily recovering from surgery to remove the shingles – along with part of his intestines.” Still alive and well at age 12, Bailey recently ate three ballpoint pens and a new pair of black pants.

“I can tell you that the list of most common canine

[Lab] ingestions would be rocks, socks, pantyhose, corn cobs, towels, plastic [usually containing food], baby toys, baby-bottle nipples, pacifiers, fishing lures, bones, feminine products, and carpet/foam/thread,” says Gail Mason, DVM, MS, DACVIM, of Bath Brunswick Veterinary Hospital in Maine, who sees her share of drooling, foaming Labs.

What’s with the Socks?

Janelle Brannock, a spokeswoman for Veterinary Pet Insurance (VPI), the nation’s oldest and largest provider of pet insurance, relates the Lab-ingestion incident that was voted “most unusual” of more than 87,000 claims received in the month of October 2008. Becca, a Colorado Labrador, ate the same sock twice. Owner Dan’s dad was on a ladder painting his house when he noticed the dog had thrown up a sock in the backyard. He didn’t think much of it at the time, but when Dan got home later, he noticed the sock had disappeared. Soon afterward, Becca became lethargic and began vomiting. The veterinarian did an ultrasound, and, “sure enough,” says Dan, “after a \$2,500 surgery, I had my sock back.” Yuck.

Millie is a two-year-old yellow Lab who belongs to Jenny, and her favorite game is to run with a sock so Jenny will chase her; but it all went south one night when Millie swallowed the sock. Not wanting to make another trip to the vet – Millie had already

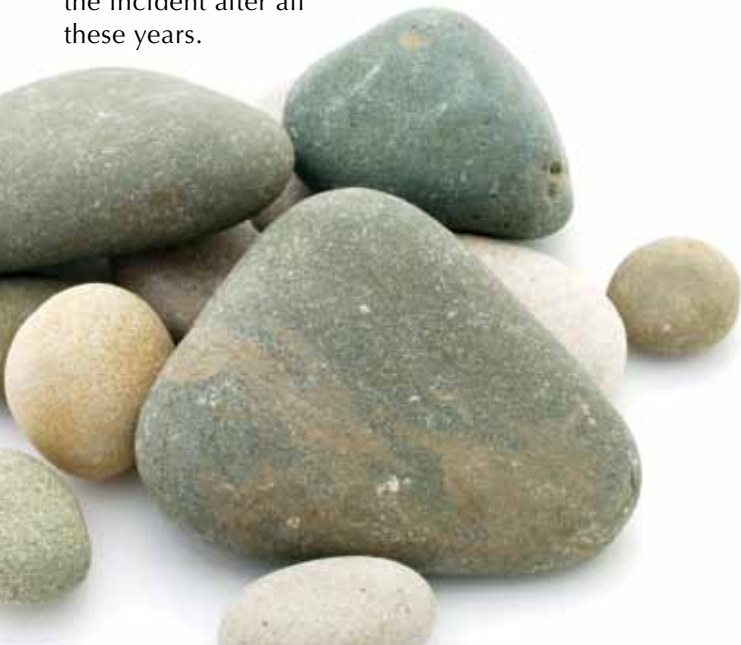
had two surgeries for a broken leg – Jenny called the 24-hour animal ER, who instructed her to fill a turkey baster with a quarter-cup of hydrogen peroxide, squirt it down Millie’s throat, and get the dog running around to induce vomiting. Only it didn’t work. Foaming at the mouth, lethargic, and eyes closing, Millie was rushed to the vet’s, where Jenny hand-fed her a concoction of cat and baby food to coat her stomach. It wasn’t pretty, but 10 minutes later the vet came out with a tray containing the sock, a bunch of rawhides, some sticks, rocks, and wads of toilet paper.

Fishing and Hunting Tales

In July of each year, VPI asks employees to nominate their most unusual claim for the annual Hambone Award. This award is given in honor of a VPI-insured dog who “got stuck in a refrigerator and ate an entire Thanksgiving ham while waiting for someone to find him.” The Lab was eventually found with a licked-clean hambone and a mild case of hypothermia. At least he didn’t eat the bone.

East Coaster Brad relates this one told to him by his boss, Dave, who took his Lab Charley fishing. But when Charley got into the tackle box, he managed to hook himself on a lure. Off to the vet they sped, where the lure was removed and Charley coughed up “a pair of balled-up socks, a rash of toys and small household items, and several plastic army men,” says Brad. Both Brad and Dave pronounced Charley fine, but crazy.

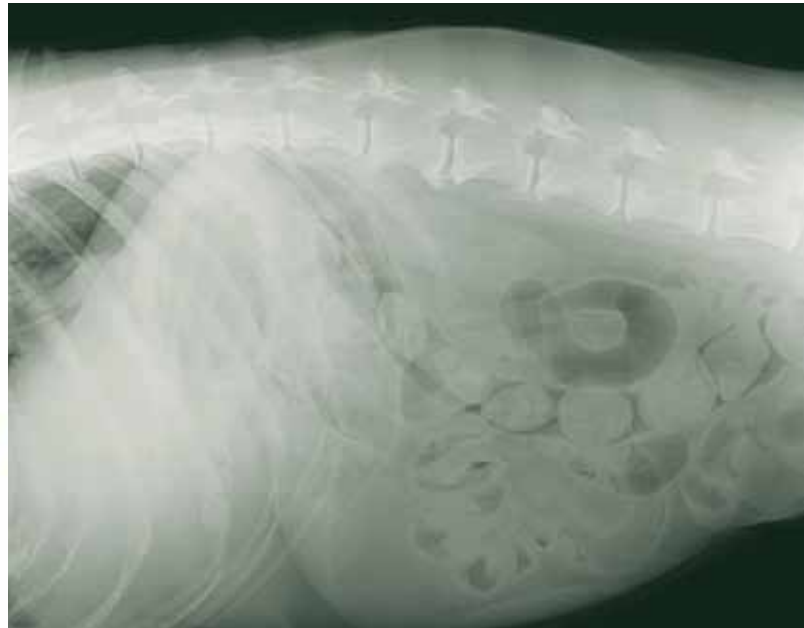
Brad also related another particularly revolting story, this one not on “the list,” but a scenario Lab owners are all too familiar with. He and a childhood friend rowed a small boat out to an island with the friend’s female Lab pup on board. Ava was in heaven when she came upon a dead seagull washed up in seaweed. She wolfed down the entire bird, threw it up within seconds, and went on her way scouring for something else to eat. “It was disgusting and I cannot believe it happened... but it was also funny,” adds Brad, who was obviously impressed, having vividly remembered the incident after all these years.



Beemer is a real rock fan.



Cooper ended up at Dr. Gail's clinic after scarfing down a rock.



Kodiak is quite uncomfortable after downing his owner's panty hose.



WHEN TO CALL THE VET

LESS SERIOUS INGESTIONS: dirt, most human food, bones (pork chop or sharp T-bones are cause for concern), "cat box" contents, small rocks, pieces of plastic, aluminum foil, coins, needles, pieces of wood, bird seed

MORE SERIOUS INGESTIONS: chemicals, medications, rodent bait, baker's chocolate, antifreeze, corn cobs, cloth (towels, pantyhose, rug/foam material, string, yarn, and ribbons can clog and eventually perforate the bowels), large rocks, or large pieces of plastic

CALL THE VET: for refusal to eat, profuse drooling, difficulty swallowing or eating, repetitive vomiting, lethargy, listlessness, apparent pain, abdominal distention, and retching

Into the Hard Stuff

Millie is kind of a hard case, as she likes to gnaw exposed brick walls and once tried to eat the dishwasher. Maybe she was teething, but that doesn't explain why she ate one of her owner's paychecks or wolfed down a bag of eight hamburger buns. Nor does it explain why Mary Kate of New York had her pearl earring snatched from her ear by her 10-week-old black Lab puppy, Molly. "Yep, it's in there," the vet said upon seeing the tiny earring in the pup's X-rays. Since then, Mary Kate has warned her friends to leave their sparkly gems at home.

Chocolate is bad for dogs, so why did Zeke crunch the top of a glass jar of hot fudge sauce? Jim of Indianapolis was flabbergasted to see the dog eat not only the chocolate, but the glass top of the jar. This is one eclectic pup: He has also been known to ingest a box of baby cereal, three large ribeye steaks, and an Outback Steakhouse gift card. He definitely has a thing for chocolate though, as he's also inhaled a package of Oreo cookies and seven pieces of Christmas fudge – which he was nice enough to unwrap first.

Poisoned for Sure

Antifreeze, rat poison, snail bait – all bad news. Ariel and her husband own a construction-related business and sometimes keep nasty products around. Zoey, their six-month-old black Lab, woke them early one morning in 1991 drooling, wobbling, and nervous – all signs that something was dreadfully wrong. In the garage they discovered that Zoey had bit into a bottle of liquid snail poison. "It is a gray, thick liquid that is extremely toxic to pets, but they love the taste of it," said Ariel. Kind of like the chocolate thing, right? Ariel's husband drove like a maniac while the dog drooled and slobbered on Ariel. Dr. Bob used activated charcoal to induce vomiting, and Zoey was as good as new.

Lucas lives on the West Coast, and his Lab Wizard will devour anything in sight. Nothing unusual there, especially when he turned out to be another chocolate lover and ate an entire bag of Hershey's Kisses, leaving shredded remnants of the bag and bits of foil all over the backyard. "She was happy as could be and didn't go to the vet," adds Lucas. On another occasion, Lucas came home to find that Wizard had feasted on a box of rat pellets. Again, she was fine. "Wizard is now seventeen, and I am convinced she is indestructible and will outlive me!"

No matter what they eat (even those unmentionables, which went, ahem, unmentioned), we love them, and they love us back. They may cost us money in veterinarian's bills and turn our hair gray when we have to race to vet to see what the puke pile will produce, but once a Lab lover, always a Lab lover.



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