



## Sensitive Stomach, Dogs

Some dogs seem to have a “sensitive stomach”. They repeatedly have problems with vomiting, diarrhea, or they don’t want to eat. If you are lucky to figure out what caused it, you can avoid it in the future. Unfortunately, in many cases, it doesn’t seem like anything changed and suddenly your dog is sick.

### **Parasites**

The first thing is to check for parasites. Have a stool sample checked when your dog isn’t having loose stools. If the test doesn’t show anything, it’s often best to treat for whipworms and Giardia.

Both of these are common parasites that can cause chronic, intermittent diarrhea. Giardia can also cause vomiting. They can be difficult to find on stool exams so this is one time that giving medicine “just in case” is a good idea.

### **Diet**



Next, look at what you are feeding your dog. Start with a high quality, digestible diet. Ones without artificial preservatives or colors are preferred. You don’t really save money with cheap food.

Some dogs can’t tolerate any change in their diet. If you tend to give a few bites of what you are eating, that may be the culprit and all you have to do is stop. Changing the brand of food or treats can also trigger problems if your dog is sensitive. Make any changes very gradually over several days.

### **Food Allergies**

Some dogs will actually be allergic or intolerant of certain foods. Food allergies will often cause skin and ear problems in addition to or instead of GI (stomach and intestines) problems.

It can sometimes be a challenge to figure out which foods are causing the problem. Blood tests can help give you an idea of what foods your pet needs to avoid. The best method, though, is with a food trial.

The most common foods dogs have problems with are proteins and grain. If your dog is eating food with beef, he might do OK on chicken. Most dogs are sensitive to multiple things, however, and that makes it harder.

If you are giving any chewable medicines (like heartworm pills), they usually have a meat base. Treats and rawhide chews can also cause problems.



Foods in the store with a label for allergies are not appropriate for a food trial. They will help certain dogs, but they are not specific enough to make sure your dog is avoiding everything that could trigger an allergy.

If you want to try some of them first, feed them for a month or two to see if they help. Otherwise, do an appropriate food trial or blood tests to test your dog for food allergies.

### **Food Trial**

A food trial requires you to use a prescription allergy food (hypoallergenic) from your veterinarian. These foods are specifically made to avoid allergic reactions from foods as well as being balanced and nutritious.

Don't give any biscuits, treats, or chewable medicines during this time. In addition, no rawhides or pig ears. It is critical that you are very careful about everything your dog eats during this trial period. If you cheat even once, it messes it up and you are back to square one.

You need to feed this diet for 8-12 weeks to see if signs improve. If so, then you can add other foods, one at a time, to the diet and see if it causes a problem.

### **Other Diets**

Some dogs don't have food allergies but do better on certain types of diets. Some do best on a "bland" very digestible diet, others with a high fiber diet. Trial and error is often the only way to find out. Start with a prescription diet to find out if it works for your dog. After you find what type is best, you can try to find something similar in a store if you don't want to continue the prescription diet.

### **Stress**

All of this becomes more challenging and frustrating when your dog only has episodes sporadically. You think everything's under control and then, wham, he's sick again. You don't think anything has changed to bring it on.

One potential cause to consider is stress. Digestive problems are common when dogs are stressed by people visiting, changes in routine, a vet visit, boarding, anything different in their world. Even getting overly excited can cause problems.

If stress seems to be a cause, try to reduce stressful events. He may benefit from some of the variety of calming products and techniques. Try different things to see what works best for your dog.

### **Other Causes**

Some dogs vomit in the morning. It appears that if they go too long without eating, they get an upset stomach. It's possible they have an excess amount of acid in their stomach. The solution is often to give them their last meal just before you go to bed. If they also have problems during the day, multiple small meals throughout the day will help. You can also leave food out all the time if your dog doesn't overeat.

Some dogs seem to have some inflammation in their stomachs that makes them prone to vomiting. They might have a small ulcer. These can be diagnosed with endoscopy, a procedure that involves placing a tube with a tiny camera on the end into the stomach to look at it.

Dogs can have Inflammatory Bowel Disease. These dogs have bouts of vomiting and/or diarrhea. Biopsies of the intestines will diagnose it. There can be other causes as well.

### **Probiotics**

Probiotics are the "good" bacteria in the intestines. They will help to keep the GI tract healthier and it boosts the immune system. They may help to keep some problems under control and are a good idea for any pet with digestive problems.

### **Summary**



If you are one of the lucky ones, you will figure it out quickly. Often, though, you need patience and persistence. It will take some time to see if food changes have helped. Even if it's intermittent, it's a good idea to find out what the cause is to prevent it from getting worse.