



# 7 Signs You Shouldn't Ignore!

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In this concise report we reveal 7 clinical signs your dog may show that you shouldn't ignore. We've singled these out because they are situations where you may not necessarily be too concerned initially and this may delay your pet getting appropriate treatment. Of course, these are not the only situations that require prompt veterinary attention and you should always call the clinic for advice if you are in any doubt. We'll cover many of these conditions in future on the Veterinary Expert website at [www.theveterinaryexpert.com](http://www.theveterinaryexpert.com)

These 7 presentations should prompt a phone call and a visit to your veterinary surgeon or veterinarian (your vet!). They are often not emergencies (although some most definitely are), but if left untreated the underlying problem could become more serious.



We hope you find this report useful and remember, if you are in any doubt that your pet may require the attention of your vet, you should call them and discuss your concerns on the telephone with a view to taking your pet for a check-up. Making this call is **never** the wrong decision.

## Editor's Note

We haven't forgotten your cats, bearded dragons, hamsters, rabbits and leopard spotted geckos!

If we tried to cover every species in this report it would get very confusing and lose its value. So, if there isn't a canine in your house then please pass this report on to a friend who does have a dog and look out for articles and reports more up your street. If there's something in particular you would like to see covered then do drop a quick email to [DrC@theveterinaryexpert.com](mailto:DrC@theveterinaryexpert.com).

Thank you.

# 1. Head shaking

This is usually a sign of irritation in the ears, and there can be a number of causes. For example, dogs will shake their heads if they have been swimming and have some water in their ears as a result. A couple of shakes is nothing to worry about but if your dog is shaking his head several times during the day and this continues then you must seek veterinary advice.

Persistent, violent shaking is a sign of severe irritation. This is often accompanied by your dog appearing restless and distressed. There may be a foreign body such as a grass seed inside the ear canal, and the ears need to be checked by your vet using an otoscope.



The most common cause of ear irritation is an infection in the external ear canal. This condition is referred to as otitis externa. Inflammation in the lining of the ear as part of a general skin irritation may be seen in some allergies. Again, this is likely to require investigation and treatment, often for the skin condition as well as the ear irritation.

If your dog has floppy ears then you may not see how bad the ears are, unless you lift up the ear flaps (or 'pinnae'). Be careful though as your dog may react unusually and possibly bite if the ear is very sore.

The ears can get very inflamed and develop a nasty infection if you ignore this problem. That will make any treatment prescribed by your vet less likely to work. If you take your dog to the vet early on then you are more likely to resolve the situation and not let the ear become damaged and the skin too thickened. Once chronic or long-standing inflammation has damaged and thickened the ear tissues it can be much harder to settle things down. You can quite quickly get to the point where surgery is required.



**Do not push cotton buds or other items down your dog's ear canal** in an attempt to clean the ear or detect a foreign body inside the ear. If there is a grass seed or another type of foreign matter inside the ear canal, introducing a cotton bud may push the item further into the ear and damage the ear drum and middle ear structures, making the initial problem much more serious. Call your vet and take your dog for a check-up.

## 2. Your dog's stools are black and smelly

Thought we'd avoid a close up picture here!



Joking aside, this is definitely something you shouldn't ignore.

Melaena (melena *US English*) is the technical term for black, tarry stools. The stools can often have a characteristic and offensive smell. Melaena is caused by the breakdown and digestion of blood in the digestive tract – it's

actually the iron in the blood that is oxidised.

In order for the blood to be degraded in this way, it has to be in the bowel for quite a while and so melaena is typically associated with bleeding higher up in the digestive tract – usually the stomach or small intestine. It can be caused if the blood is swallowed.

So, if you notice your dog is producing very dark or black stools then don't necessarily think it is 'just them', you need to seek veterinary advice.

When red blood is seen in the stools, this usually indicates that the bleeding is occurring in the lower part of the gastrointestinal tract. This could include the lower small intestine, the large intestine, rectum and anus.

Fresh blood is often much more alarming and you are very likely to phone your veterinarian for advice. The dark, black stools may not make you as concerned and so you could delay. However, the dark, tarry stools can be an indication of a more serious problem so make sure you get things checked out.

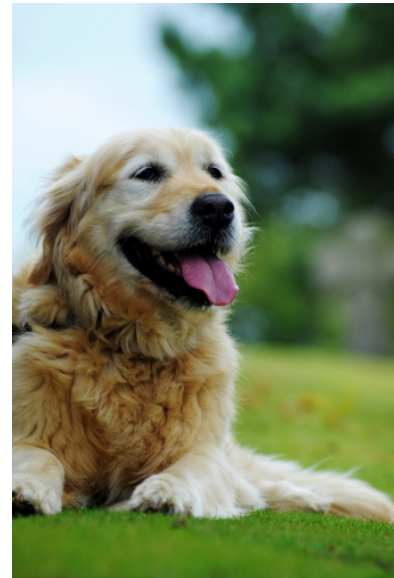
In either case your vet will probably want to examine your dog and investigate to find out where the blood is coming from and what is causing the bleeding.



### 3. Your dog starts sitting down on walks

Your dog usually loves his walks and leaves you behind whenever he gets the chance. Then he starts sitting down during your normal length outings and has to be encouraged to get up and carry on.

There are a number of possible causes and you may have some indication of which could apply to your dog- for example if they have put on weight and are now considerably overweight. Sometimes it can be difficult to tell if your dog is overweight- a rough guide is that you should be able to feel their ribs (when they are covered with a thick layer of fat this can be very difficult) and they should have a noticeable 'waist' when you look at them from above. The best way to find out your dog's optimum weight is to take him down to your veterinary practice - most vets now have free weigh-in clinics. Your pet will be weighed and you'll get advice on diet and exercise from qualified veterinary professionals.



Heart problems can also cause exercise intolerance- your dog may get out of breath and struggle not just on walks but perhaps also going up stairs. Sometimes but not always this is accompanied by a cough.

Your vet can detect heart problems by examining your dog and carrying out additional diagnostic tests such as ECGs, X-rays or ultrasound scans. Most heart problems in dogs can be treated effectively, improving your dog's ability to exercise and enjoy life.

Pain is another common problem that may cause your dog to sit down on a walk. Arthritis is very common in dogs of all ages (they don't have to be old!). Some dogs don't show obvious signs such as limping or holding up a leg when they are affected by arthritis. They may just be quieter than usual and reluctant to exercise. Many other types of pain can cause similar signs- for example pain caused by a disc problem in the spine.

Your vet will be able to examine your dog and locate the source of the pain. There are many treatments and lifestyle modifications that are effective for arthritis in dogs. Sometimes surgery is required, but usually medical management and weight control are very effective. Treatment for other causes of pain depends on the diagnosis reached by your vet.

Don't just ignore your dog getting stiff or reluctant to exercise, especially if they are older. People may think 'oh he's just getting on a bit' and while it is true that there is no cure for arthritis for example, there are many things that can be done to improve your dog's quality of life.



## 4. Excessive salivation – Your dog is drooling...everywhere!

Some dogs are just naturally...well slobbery. These are often the larger or giant breeds such as St Bernards .You either love it or hate it! And it will be no surprise to you that yours isn't the only dog that drools if they get a sniff of the Sunday roast or a particularly tasty snack you are enjoying.

Run and get a tissue and then put them outside.  
Sorted!

It is also not uncommon for a young puppy to salivate profusely when they go for their first car ride. This is a result of motion sickness.

If your pet is salivating unusually, at inappropriate times or for no apparent reason and continues to do so then a trip to your veterinarian should be arranged.

Drooling when there is tasty food around (or even if they think there may be...remember Pavlov's dogs!) is normal. But drooling and salivating when not expected should always be viewed with suspicion. The veterinary term for the excessive production of saliva is 'ptyalism'. In many cases of excessive drooling, it is not so much the excessive production of saliva by the salivary glands that is the problem but more that it is overflowing because it can't be swallowed properly. This would be the case if there were an obstruction in the oesophagus (gullet). Certain breeds such as terriers are prone to getting bones stuck half way down to the stomach – an uncomfortable and potentially very dangerous situation.

Ulceration in the mouth, trauma to the tongue or gums and some forms of cancer will cause excessive salivation. Some poisons, household chemicals and, in certain parts of the world, animal poisons (e.g. black widow spiders) will also cause excessive salivation. So the take home message is that 'excessive drooliness' -for want of a better description!- can be associated with a number of conditions that require prompt veterinary attention.



## 5. Distended abdomen

Ok. This one wins first prize in the 'Situations when you call your veterinarian fast' category! If your dog's abdomen or 'belly' suddenly looks distended or significantly rounder than normal then they may be starting with a gastric dilatation. Gastric dilatation, commonly referred to as bloat, can be life threatening very quickly – under an hour in fact. So, if your dog's abdomen suddenly looks distended, feels tense or tight like a drum and they are uncomfortable, restless and perhaps salivating then call your vet NOW. Not in half an hour...NOW.

The cause of gastric dilatation is not fully understood. Certain breeds are predisposed to this condition, including Great Danes, German Shepherds, Standard Poodle, Rottweiler, Akita, Irish Setter, Doberman, Irish Wolfhound, St. Bernards, Labrador Retriever, Newfoundland.



As you will notice, all of these are large or giant breeds. Small breeds are very rarely affected.

Initially the stomach dilates with air. The enlarged stomach compresses important veins affecting the general circulation and also pushes on the diaphragm making it harder for the patient to breathe. The stomach can also twist along its long axis, which compounds an already life-threatening situation. The twisting of an abdominal organ is called volvulus and so the condition is most correctly referred to as Gastric Dilatation-Volvulus, or simply 'GDV'.

Very rapidly the patient is in severe circulatory compromise or shock, bacterial toxins from the twisted bowel can enter the circulation further affecting the heart. It is a horrible condition and dogs with GDV can die very fast.

GDV is a very serious condition, and it requires intensive treatment which is likely to include surgery. Your vet has a greater chance of a successful outcome with your dog if they see your pet as early on in the course of the condition as possible.

Of course, there are other causes of a distended abdomen. Many of these are potentially serious conditions and require investigation. We recommend calling your own vet and seeking advice with a view to taking your dog for an examination.

## 6. Bleeding gums or blood on toys

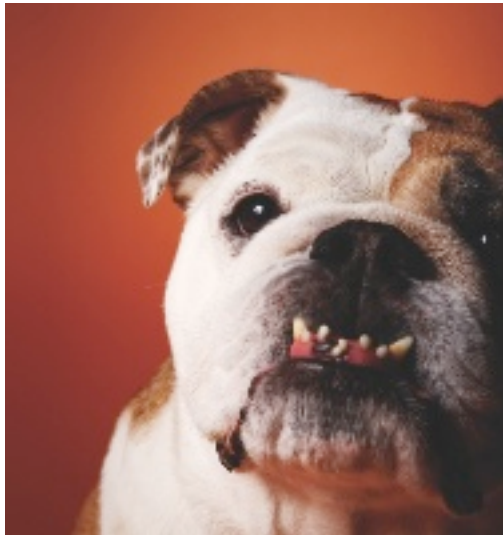
You are playing in the garden and your dog is chasing the ball or a favourite toy. They bring it back to you and you notice some blood on the toy. What do you do?

Ignore it?

Well it may be something and nothing but bleeding gums, as with us, can signify some potentially quite serious oral health problems. You've seen the ads for human toothpaste- you wouldn't ignore bleeding from your eyes etc. All trying to make the point that bleeding gums should not be ignored or the consequences may be serious.

Periodontal disease is common in dogs and cats- just like humans. Most owners do not brush their pets' teeth or examine their mouth regularly, which means that gums and teeth can be in a bad way by the time any problem is noticed.

Regular checks are very important- if in any doubt take your pet along to your vet for a complete examination. Many practices now offer free dental health checks- you don't pay for the examination or the advice given.



Early intervention and preventive treatment is likely to enable your dog or cat to keep more of their teeth healthy for longer.

So if you see blood on toys or notice that your pet's gums are bleeding, phone your vet and get it checked out before the condition becomes serious enough to require tooth removal.



## 7. Wetting in the night.

If your dog suddenly starts wetting in the night don't immediately jump to the conclusion that they are no longer house trained and they need a good telling off



to make them realise this was a bad idea. It is far more likely that they have had to go for a wee in the night because they have drunk too much in the day. What goes in must come out!

The reason they have done this is probably because they were thirsty. Now, if this is a one off event then I would ignore it and just clean it up, shampoo that bit of carpet and forget

about it. No telling off please – it won't do any good, they don't know why you are telling them off and they will just get upset and, if they have got any sense, go off and chew up one of your shoes...not really.

If it is persistent then you need to ask the question 'what has changed?'

Keep an eye on your pet's water bowl. Are they drinking more? Are they always looking for a drink perhaps from puddles, the leaky hosepipe or even, dare I say it, the loo!

The technical term for increased thirst is **polydipsia**.

Consistent polydipsia is abnormal and should be investigated promptly. Some of the conditions that can cause polydipsia are:

- Diabetes – They will often be very hungry as well with diabetes.
- Pyometra – An infection of the womb which must be treated quickly. You may also notice your dog has a nasty discharge.
- Kidney problems
- Some hormonal conditions

Most of these can be treated quite effectively but first they need to be identified. The sooner your dog is seen by your vet the better.

**Editor's Note:** *Your dog doing a full urination in the night because they just can't hang on any longer should not be confused with incontinence. Incontinence is the involuntary leakage of urine – they can't decide when this happens. A common example is when some neutered female dogs leak small volumes of urine onto their beds. This is generally due to a hormonal imbalance that can be easily treated.*

I hope you have found this report helpful. Check [www.theveterinaryexpert.com](http://www.theveterinaryexpert.com) for more articles and news relevant to your pet's health and well-being.