



## **Eating Non-Food Items**

### **Common Culprits**

The most common non-food items consumed are socks and stockings, diapers, corn cobs, cooked bones and toys, but dogs do have ways of surprising us! Dogs who like to eat non-food items tend to have favourites and are usually repeat offenders. It is important to understand WHY the dog is eating these items to understand how best to manage this behaviour. It is also helpful to formulate a good relationship with your local vet to ensure they can help fix the problem quickly if your dog does ingest something he shouldn't have.

### **Why?**

Before this problem can be properly addressed, it is important to try to understand WHY your dog is eating things he shouldn't. It is always a good idea to have a veterinarian examine him to ensure there is no underlying medical cause before working on next steps. The reasoning behind eating non-food items can be simple - the dog enjoys eating these things or may denote a more complicated medical or behavioural concern. If you suspect the latter, it would be advisable to find a veterinary behaviourist to help you work through the problem. You can also read the 'Destructive Behaviour' and 'Overstimulation' resource, as they may have helpful information.

### **Management**

Management is the best tool for preventing dogs from eating non-food items. The very best thing for you to do would be to remove or 'lock away' all the objects the dog likes to eat. This means if the dog likes socks, keep all the socks in a closed room or drawer – especially socks that are in the laundry. Do not allow the dog to access loose socks at any time, even when under supervision. This applies to all non-food items the dog may try to eat. Constant supervision is the next step, always leave a leash trailing on the dog, if the dog tries to get something he shouldn't, grab the end of the leash and start walking away. Once the dog starts following you and not paying attention to the object, mark with a "YES" to let him know he has done the right thing and go pick up the object or have someone else get it. Management is NEVER over, even if you have gone months without an incident.

### **Leave-It**

Teaching a 'leave-it' may also help but will NOT solve the problem. Leave-it is a cue used for objects the dog likes to eat, but is NEVER allowed to have, so dog toys and treats should NOT be used. Start with the dog leashed and pick an appropriate object, so if the dog loves eating barbie dolls, use a doll. With the dog leashed, throw the toy JUST out of their reach and wait for their nose to look somewhere else. The second the dog is no longer paying attention to the object, mark with a YES, and pick up the object. Do this until the dog quickly redirects his focus to anything BUT the toy. Then add in the 'leave-it' cue and

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mark with a YES when the dog looks away from the toy. Treats should not be used when teaching a 'leave-it' to not encourage your dog to get the forbidden object to get a treat when he 'leaves-it.' This DOES NOT NEGATE the management aspect and may take months to years to master because of the self-rewarding nature of eating foreign objects. If eating the object is MORE rewarding than listening to you, the dog may never stop eating non-food items unless very good management practices are in place.

### **Find Something the Dog CAN Chew**

Removing all inedible objects may mean your dog no longer has anything to play with. It is important to replace all objects he cannot have with some toys that he can play with. Try to find some 'indestructible' toys, but ALWAYS supervise when he is interacting with toys. Even indestructible toys can be ingested if the dog is determined.

**Disclaimer:** If you suspect your dog has eaten something they shouldn't have, DO NOT WAIT TO GO TO THE VET. Obstructions can be life-threatening and foreign body surgeries can be VERY expensive. It is always safer to go to the vet right away if you suspect something has been eaten.

### **Support:**

Our Behaviour Support Team can help to provide resources and tips if you experience concerns in the home environment. With your adoption the GTHS will provide an over the phone consultation in order to provide you with tips and resources to set your new dog up for success. In all cases of dog adoptions, the GTHS recommends hiring a professional dog training or behavioural consultant to ensure your relationship with your new dog starts off on the right paw! A list of local trainers is enclosed in your adoption package.

Our Behaviour Support Team can be reached at [behaviour@gths.ca](mailto:behaviour@gths.ca)

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