

Why does my dog eat grass? Sometimes she vomits after eating it, other times it doesn't seem to upset her stomach.

This is one of those strange things dogs do that veterinary behaviorists, nutritionists and internists have tried to explain for quite a while, but still can't agree on a clear explanation. There are several possibilities, which I can review for you and you can decide which makes the most sense for your dog.

Dogs use their noses and mouths to explore their world. The sweet smell, interesting texture and taste may appeal to a healthy dog. Most dogs are willing to taste almost anything that is in front of them, including grass. Dogs have learned to survive by not being too picky about their food. They are not strict carnivores as are cats. In the wild if they can't find a source of meat, they will readily go vegetarian, chewing on roots, leafy stalks and other vegetable and plant material. Perhaps modern dogs get a craving for the nutrients (minerals, vitamins, enzymes or fiber) they find in fresh grass that are lacking in their commercially prepared diets. In other words, they may decide to nibble on grass just because it's available and tasty, or maybe their body is telling them they need it to fulfill a nutritional deficiency. Perhaps a diet change is in order. Healthy dogs can generally eat grass without getting sick, and you may see some of it pass through in the stool.

The opposite camp feels that dogs that eat grass are experiencing an upset stomach for some other reason – perhaps they ate something else that disagreed with them, or maybe are suffering from a viral or parasitic infection. They eat the grass in an effort to vomit and perhaps feel better in the process. These dogs may be the ones who seem to have a desperate craving for grass. They dart out the door and devour as much grass as they can, gulping it down without chewing. Once the long blades of grass get to their stomach, they retch and then vomit the grass up, often accompanied by a lot of frothy mucus. If they seem fine after this single episode, their efforts may have been successful, but if they continue to eat grass, and continue to vomit it is time to visit your veterinarian. X-rays to look for something causing an obstruction or blood and stool tests to look for infectious causes of gastro-intestinal disorders are needed to find a cause and appropriate treatment.

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