

My dog eats acorns out of the back yard and I never worried about it until my neighbor said they can be poisonous and make a dog sick. Is this true? What should I look for?

This is a great question as fall is right around the corner and many of us are seeing acorns in our yards. Yes, acorns can cause dogs to become ill. They contain toxins that are produced by the oak trees and can cause stomach upset and kidney disease. Illness results after consuming large quantities of young oak leaves in the spring or green acorns in the fall. Clinical signs include loss of appetite, lethargy, dehydration, increased thirst and urination and constipation. Blood work may reveal elevated kidney values as well as changes in the electrolytes. In serious, but very rare cases, death may result. Kidney disease is much more common in sheep and cattle than in dogs.

More common concerns I have about acorn consumption in a dog would be gastritis or inflammation of the stomach, as well as gastrointestinal obstruction. As acorns are not part of a normal diet for a dog, eating them causes irritation and inflammation in the stomach and intestines as the body tries to digest the foreign material. The size and shape of an acorn also allows it to become a potentially life threatening foreign body if swallowed whole. The acorn may form a plug in the intestines and prevent passage of food out of the stomach or through the intestinal tract. If one acorn does not cause the problem, several may. This is definitely a concern if you see your dog walking around and picking up numerous acorns by the mouthful.

If your dog becomes ill after eating acorns, call a veterinarian immediately. Make sure to mention that you have acorns in your yard and that your dog likes to eat them. X-rays of the abdomen to determine if there is a blockage and blood work to evaluate kidney function will need to be performed. Your veterinarian may elect to start him on IV fluids and medications to help support and soothe the stomach.

Since you know you have acorns in your yard and your dog likes to eat them, I'd recommend frequently raking and confining him to an area that is not under oak trees. It is important to prevent acorn ingestion before it becomes a serious problem.

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