

I have a lab mix that likes to chew on sticks even though he has plenty of chew toys. He is really healthy and has never had any problems until recently. For the past day he seems to be drooling a lot and will paw at his face occasionally. I don't know what the problem is but the drooling does not seem to be getting better. Does he need to go to the vet's office?

A dog that is drooling and pawing at his face should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible. With the history of chewing on sticks there is the possibility that a piece of the stick may be stuck in his mouth. Sometimes the stick will splinter, causing a small piece to create a foreign body in the mouth. If it goes deep enough, it can cause an abscess that is tender and will cause drooling and a noticeable swelling. Sometimes the piece can get stuck and rub against the cheek until it becomes very sore and causes an infection. On occasion, a piece of stick will get lodged across the roof of the mouth. This can be very painful and will cause them to paw at their face, in a hopeless attempt to remove the stick.

If his chew toys are too hard, that could be the problem. Chewing on hard toys or bones can result in tooth fractures, usually the pre-molars and molars. These fractures, referred to as slab fractures because of the way the tooth shears off, are very painful. They can cause an infection if the pulp cavity of the tooth becomes exposed. In some cases, an abscess will form as a result of these fractures. The pain associated with a dental fracture can cause a dog to drool and paw at his face also.

Your dog should also have a thorough oral exam to check for oral tumors. These tumors can form along the gum line or in the back of the mouth. Malignant oral tumors can ulcerate and make the mouth very sore. Some tumors can become very big and cause the dog to drool since he is unable to swallow. Some tumors in the mouth are benign but it is often difficult to tell the difference between a benign and malignant tumor without a biopsy.

I would recommend having your dog seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible. From what you are describing, there could be something serious going on in his mouth that requires medical attention.

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