



Emergency Alert: Foreign Body Ingestion

What is a Foreign Body?

A **foreign body** is any non-food object that your pet eats which can get stuck in their stomach or intestines.

While many small objects may pass harmlessly, those that get lodged or cause irritation can create a life-threatening emergency.

⚠ Common Culprits in Dogs and Cats

Dogs (Often large, indiscriminate chewers)	Cats (Often attracted to linear/small items)
Socks, underwear, pantyhose	String, yarn, ribbon, tinsel (Linear FBs)
Bones (especially cooked bones that splinter)	Hair ties, rubber bands
Toys (pieces, stuffing, squeakers)	Small toy parts
Rocks, sticks, corn cobs	Needles and thread
Plastics, bottle caps	Small pieces of plants (can be toxic)
Batteries (can cause toxicity)	



Why is Foreign Body Ingestion an Emergency?

An object stuck in your pet's digestive tract is an extremely serious, time-sensitive veterinary emergency for several reasons:

1. Gastrointestinal Obstruction (Blockage)

- **Complete Blockage:** The object totally prevents the passage of food, fluid, and gas. This causes extreme pain and leads to severe, life-threatening dehydration and electrolyte imbalance.
- **Loss of Blood Supply:** The obstruction can cut off the blood flow to the surrounding section of the intestine. When this happens, the tissue rapidly begins to die (**necrosis**), which can lead to:

2. Intestinal Perforation (Tearing)

- **Sharp Objects:** Objects like bones, needles, or sharp plastic can puncture the stomach or intestinal wall.
- **Linear Foreign Bodies (Strings, Ribbons):** These are extremely dangerous. One end often anchors (like under the tongue), and as the intestine tries to pass the rest, the string acts like a saw, tearing the bowel wall.
- **Perforation Risk:** A tear in the bowel wall allows the contents (feces, bacteria) to leak out into the abdomen, causing a deadly, widespread infection called **septic peritonitis**.

3. Toxicity

- Items like **batteries** (which can cause chemical burns and metal toxicity) or items containing **zinc** or **lead** can dissolve in the stomach, releasing poisons into the bloodstream and causing life-threatening organ damage.

In all of these scenarios, immediate medical intervention—often including emergency surgery—is required to save your pet's life. Delays can increase tissue damage, infection risk, and decrease the chance of a successful outcome.

Recognizing the Signs

Symptoms can vary depending on where the object is stuck, but if you notice **any** of the following, seek immediate veterinary care:

- **Repeated or Projectile Vomiting:** The most common sign, especially if it occurs after drinking water.
 - **Loss of Appetite (Anorexia) or Refusal to Eat:** Even favorite treats are refused.
 - **Lethargy or Weakness:** Your pet seems unusually tired, withdrawn, or unwilling to play.
 - **Abdominal Pain:** Whining, restlessness, a hunched-over posture, or growling/yelping when you touch their belly.
 - **Changes in Bowel Movements:** Severe diarrhea, straining to defecate, or no stool produced at all.
 - **Paw-at-Mouth/Excessive Drooling:** May indicate an object is stuck in the esophagus or throat.
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Diagnosis and Treatment Options

Your veterinarian will use a combination of methods to diagnose and treat the foreign body:

1. **Physical Exam:** Checking for abdominal pain or a palpable foreign object.
2. **Diagnostic Imaging:**
 - **X-Rays (Radiographs):** Can quickly detect dense objects (bones, metal) and show specific gas patterns indicative of a blockage.
 - **Ultrasound:** Excellent for locating non-metal objects (fabric, rubber) and assessing the health of the intestinal wall.
3. **Treatment:**
 - **Induced Vomiting:** Only possible if the object was *very* recently ingested (usually within 1–2 hours) and the object is **not** sharp or toxic (which could cause damage on the way up). **DO NOT attempt this at home without veterinary instruction.**
 - **Endoscopy:** A non-surgical procedure where a flexible camera is passed down the throat into the stomach to grab and remove the object. Only possible for objects lodged in the esophagus or stomach.
 - **Emergency Surgery:** The definitive treatment for most intestinal blockages, perforations, or objects that cannot be removed via endoscopy. This involves opening the abdomen to remove the object and repair any damaged bowel.

If you suspect your pet has eaten a foreign object, the sooner you act, the better the prognosis.