

Foreign Bodies – No Laughing Matter

If you have a Clumber spaniel, odds are that you know of more than one Clumber that has eaten something it shouldn't have. Trying to keep our dogs safe from eating things that could harm them is probably one of the hardest, yet most important jobs we have as owners. Far too often we hear people chuckling about the strange things their dogs have eaten. "They always come out" is a phrase I hate – because the fact is, they DON'T always come out.

Ask anyone who works in a veterinary practice. Foreign body surgeries are far too common. There is even a list on the Clumber Spaniel Health Foundation website that was compiled, of many things that Clumbers have swallowed – and mostly lived to tell the tale.

However, foreign bodies can be fatal. No one wants to lose their beloved pet to a sock, or a corn cob, or a toy. So, what can we do?

First, train YOURSELVES as owners. Dirty clothes go in hampers – always. Know whether YOUR dog is safe with soft toys and squeakers – some are, many are not. Keep food far out of reach – and with our breed's tendency towards counter surfing, that means FAR out of reach. Don't let guests set purses or other potentially tempting objects within Clumber reach. Know YOUR dog – for us, that means we can't leave a hand towel in the guest bathroom – because Fridley WILL find it.

Second, teach your dog to GIVE on command. Our pups learn this as babies, partly because we hunt with them, and they need to willingly hand us the birds they retrieve. It is JUST as important that they give us contraband! Playing "take it" and "give" with toys and bumpers and teaching them that they are always praised and/or rewarded just might save your dog from an exploratory surgery...or worse. Yelling or screaming or becoming angry with them only teaches them to hide what they've stolen – which helps nothing and can lead to tragedy.

Third, learn the signs of a possible obstruction. None of us are perfect. We've had dogs swallow things (a sock, a squeaker). A dog with a foreign body often loses their appetite. If they do eat, they often vomit 30 minutes to a few hours afterwards. They may stop stooling or might only produce diarrhea. This is not a wait and see time. Getting your dog to the vet and telling them "Clumbers are worse than labs about eating things" (every vet in the country will understand what this means!), may make all the difference. Radiographs or a barium series can be very helpful.

People often ask, "why do they do this?". My answer is always "we breed these dogs to put things in their mouths. We cannot be surprised when they do just that". So, we need to make sure their environment is safe, that we have training in place before it's ever needed, and that we understand the signs that may signal an obstruction. Even with all of that – pet insurance never hurts!

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