

Plant Eating: Let Them Eat Fiber!

Plant eating

An 11-year-old, castrated miniature poodle was referred for a 7-year history of plant-eating behavior followed by vomiting. No specific behavior patterns had been noted by the owners before or after the dog ate plants, and the behavior occurred only once daily. The dog had mildly soft stools, but the history, physical examination, and laboratory diagnostics were otherwise unremarkable. Gastrointestinal endoscopy, histologic examination, and functional tests were also unremarkable. Food allergy was ruled out based on clinical presentation and a negative response to an 8-week hypoallergenic diet trial. Other differential diagnoses, including a variety of behavioral disorders or other diseases that might contribute to pica and vomiting, were also considered and ruled out. The authors thus assumed the dog was eating plants to correct a dietary deficiency or to relieve digestive problems. A commercial high-fiber prescription diet was recommended, adjusting fiber to 20% of the diet. Within 3 days, the plant-eating behavior and vomiting stopped, and there was no recurrence as of a 13-month follow-up. It was concluded that the plant-eating behavior was the result of a deficient diet, especially deficiency of fiber, and the vomiting was caused by mechanical irritation of the plant or acute consumption of a large quantity of poorly digestible material.



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COMMENTARY: Owners often complain of plant-eating behavior in their dogs. While the behavior may often simply be a manifestation of curiosity, long-term consumption of large amounts of plant matter may be problematic if it has been chemically treated. Numerous theories have been put forward to explain this behavior, such as self-medication for gastrointestinal distress, taste preference, instinct passed on by wolf ancestry, and supplementation of a deficient diet. None has yet been scientifically proven. This case was interesting because the behavior had occurred for a long time and the medical workup was quite extensive, but after all of that the dog responded extremely quickly to a simple dietary change. A short, high-fiber diet trial may be worth trying in pets with a history of plant eating before a great deal of advanced, time-consuming, and costly diagnostics are conducted.

A high fiber diet responsive case in a poodle dog with long-term plant eating behavior. Kang B-T, Jung D-I, Yoo J-H, et al. *J VETMED SCI* 69:779-782, 2007.

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