



Gilbert
Queen
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Emergency
Veterinarian

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Gastrointestinal Foreign Body

Foreign bodies occur when pets ingest items that will not readily pass through their gastrointestinal tract. These items may be anything from string, clothing, sticks, toys, to any other item that fails to pass, including human food products such as bones or trash. The problems that are caused vary with the duration that the foreign body has been present, the location of the foreign body, the degree of obstruction that is caused, or problems associated with the material of the foreign body. Some ingested items, such as older pennies or lead material, can cause systemic toxicities while other may cause regional damage to the intestinal tract itself due to compression or obstruction.

Gastrointestinal foreign bodies, especially strings, can often lead to perforation of the intestinal tract and spillage of intestinal contents into the abdomen. This condition quickly leads to inflammation of the abdominal lining (peritonitis) and allows bacterial proliferation and contamination (sepsis), which are both life-threatening complications. While some small foreign bodies will pass, many will become lodged along the gastrointestinal tract and cause discomfort and make your pet sick. Some foreign bodies located in the stomach may be retrieved with the use of an endoscope; however, most require surgical abdominal exploration and removal. Occasionally, foreign bodies will become lodged in the esophagus at the base of the heart or at the diaphragm, which may require thoracic (chest) surgery.

Clinical signs can vary significantly with the degree of obstruction, location, duration, and type of foreign body. Commonly noted signs include: vomiting, anorexia (loss of appetite), abdominal tenderness or pain, dehydration, diarrhea (with or without the presence of blood), or lethargy

We will likely recommend initial blood work that includes a complete blood count (CBC), serum chemistry, and a urinalysis. This combined will help to rule out other causes for your pet's symptoms. Abdominal, and occasionally thoracic radiographs are regularly performed. Positive contrast radiographs (using barium to highlight the inside of the stomach and intestines) may be performed when routine radiographs fail to show the cause for the clinical signs. Abdominal ultrasound can also be very helpful in identifying gastrointestinal foreign bodies. Depending on the obstructive item, it may not be visible on imaging diagnostics, and may still require exploratory surgery to find the cause of obstruction or gastrointestinal symptoms.

Surgical intervention is not always required with gastrointestinal foreign bodies. Occasionally, the item ingested is small and smooth enough to pass through the gastrointestinal tract without causing damage or becoming lodged. However, most gastrointestinal foreign bodies become lodged within the stomach or intestines and require surgery such as a gastrotomy (opening the stomach) or enterotomy (opening the intestine). If a section of bowel is irreversibly damaged, an intestinal resection and anastomosis (procedure to remove a segment of intestines and reattach the healthy ends) may be required.



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Treatment Options:

- **Outpatient care:** **Estimated cost: \$900 - \$1200**
 - Price includes: Initial exam, subcutaneous fluids, anti-nausea medication, injectable and oral antibiotics, and anti-diarrheal medication.
****This option has a low likelihood of improving if obstruction is unable to pass on its own. If dramatic improvement is not seen quickly, your pet will likely need surgery and/or hospitalization.**

- **Outpatient care with Diagnostics:** **Estimated cost: \$1100 - \$1800**
 - Price includes: Initial exam, subcutaneous fluids, anti-nausea medication, injectable and oral antibiotics, and anti-diarrheal medication, blood work, and x-rays.
****This option has a low likelihood of improving if obstruction is unable to pass on its own. If dramatic improvement is not seen quickly, your pet will likely need surgery and/or hospitalization.**

- **Gastrointestinal foreign body Surgery** **Estimated cost: \$4000 - \$6000**
***Acceptable only if patient is stable to endure surgery**
 - Price includes: Initial exam, initial blood work, x-rays, IV catheter placement, IV fluid therapy, general anesthesia, surgery, 24-hour hospitalization stay, injectable and oral antibiotics, injectable and oral pain medications, and e-collar.
****additional hospitalization may be required based on individual patient response to post-operative care, even with an uneventful surgery. Each additional day of hospitalization ranges \$800-\$1200.***

- **Complicated gastrointestinal foreign body surgery** **Estimated cost: \$6000 - \$8000**
 - Price includes: Initial exam, initial blood work, x-rays, IV catheter placement, IV fluid therapy, general anesthesia, surgery with complications (multiple enterotomy sites or a resection and anastomosis), 48-hour hospitalization stay, injectable and oral antibiotics, injectable and oral pain medications, and e-collar.
****additional hospitalization may be required based on individual patient response to post-operative care. Each additional day of hospitalization ranges \$900-\$1400.***

- **Euthanasia** **Estimated cost: \$220 - \$500**
 - Considered the humane choice if not responding to treatment, or if unable to provide care.