**You Ate What?**

Hello and Happy Holidays from the staff at Antrim Veterinary Hospital. This holiday season we are all eating more then normal. But what happens when our fur children eat things they shouldn’t? This can pose a serious threat of our pets getting a foreign body. A foreign body is when something is swallowed but can not pass through the intestinal tract. Once the obstruction occurs the blood supply to the intestines may be compromised which is an emergency. Even more dangerous, the foreign object/material could perforate the intestinal tract allowing intestinal contents into the abdomen which is a life-threatening complication.

Symptoms of a foreign body can include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, lack of appetite, lethargy, straining to defecate, and, in cases of a linear foreign body, a string protruding from the anus or caught under the tongue. Sometimes a veterinarian can palpate an object in the abdomen during an exam. The veterinarian will likely recommend radiographs (x-ray) or an ultrasound. Once a foreign body is diagnosed bloodwork and a urinalysis should be assessed to see if the patient’s health status has been compromised by the obstruction.

The only treatment for a foreign body is removal. If the object is small enough and can be located by radiographs or ultrasound, endoscopy may be successful. However, often foreign body removal entails exploratory surgery. With this, your pet will be anesthetized, an abdominal incision made, and the veterinarian will trace the intestinal tract starting at the stomach and following it through to the colon. When the blockage has been found, the intestinal tract will be opened to remove the item, assessed for damage, and then all incisions will be closed. If the intestines have been too damaged by the object a portion may have to be removed.

Pets typically recover quite well following surgery. Many pets return to eating within 1-2 days and clinical signs completely resolve. While the prognosis for foreign bodies is typically very good there are factors then can affect this. These factors include the location, size, and shape of the object as well as the duration and degree of the blockage and how much, if any, intestine needs to be removed. The pet’s health status at the time of ingesting the foreign body can also affect the prognosis.

The most common foreign bodies are strings, children’s toys, leashes, clothing, bones, and trash. Some items ingested may be toxic when absorbed such as lead, batteries, and pennies minted after 1982 which contain large amounts of zinc. Dogs and cats are curious by nature so keeping items our pets can chew out of reach and having structured play sessions to relieve their boredom can help lessen your chances of having an unhappy outcome after an unintended ingestion. You may be lucky enough for your pet to pass the object on their own but if you see your pet ingest an object be safe, not sorry and call us at 410 751 0091.