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# Is It Dangerous for Dogs to Drink Salt Water?

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Anyone who has ever swallowed a mouthful of salt water when swimming in the ocean knows how unpleasant it tastes. When dogs drink salt water, it can be dangerous for them, and it can even be deadly.

## Dogs Drinking Salt Water

Dogs love the beach, but playing games of fetch, chasing waves, and [swimming](#) can all lead to a thirsty dog who consumes salt water. In most cases, a few mouthfuls of salt water may only cause [diarrhea](#). Consuming large amounts of salt water, however, can be [fatal](#).

When a dog ingests salt water, the excess salt draws water from the blood into the intestines, leading to diarrhea, vomiting, and dehydration. Salt water also disrupts the fluid balance in your dog. Dogs with toxic levels of sodium in their systems have a mortality rate higher than 50 percent, regardless of treatment.

When too much salt builds up in a dog's body, her cells release their water content to try and balance out the sodium disparity. This, in turn, causes a litany of serious health effects. It can cause seizures, a loss of brain cells, injury to the kidneys, and severe dehydration. If a dog with saltwater poisoning isn't treated medically, the condition can easily lead to death.

## Treating Saltwater Poisoning in Dogs

If you suspect that your dog has consumed a toxic amount of salt water, your best bet is to get him to the veterinarian as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, there is no specific treatment for saltwater poisoning in dogs.

Your veterinarian will attempt to restore your dog's water and electrolyte balance to normal levels. Lowering sodium levels too quickly, however, can be dangerous, increasing the likelihood of cerebral edema (fluid on the brain). A veterinarian will administer IV fluids to try and flush the excess salt out of your dog's body. He'll also monitor her electrolytes, provide treatment for brain swelling, control seizures, and offer supportive care.

In ideal cases, the water and electrolyte balance will be restored over a period of 2-3 days. This usually involves hospitalization. Further supportive care and medications may be given, depending on your dog's condition.



## Symptoms of Saltwater Poisoning in Dogs

Drinking excessive amounts of salt water typically results in vomiting within a few hours. While mild cases may only involve a few bouts of diarrhea, in severe cases the dog may suffer from weakness, diarrhea, muscle tremors, and [seizures](#). If your dog shows any of these signs, even diarrhea, call your veterinarian or local veterinary emergency hospital for advice.

One of the most noticeable symptoms of dog saltwater poisoning is odd behavior. Too much sodium in the body can cause your dog to become confused, non-responsive, lethargic, or otherwise just *off*.

## Preventing Saltwater Poisoning

The amount of salt water required to reach toxic levels depends on your dog's access to fresh water. The best thing you can do to keep your dog safe at the beach is to make sure he always has [access to fresh water](#). If you notice your dog drinking ocean water, restrict his access, provide him with fresh water and shade, and keep an eye on him for signs of toxicity. Take a break away from the water every 15 minutes to help avoid salt poisoning as well.

## Too Much Fresh Water

Dogs can also drive their salt content too low if they drink too much fresh water when swimming in a lake or pool, according to Heather Loenser, DVM, the senior veterinary officer for the American Animal Hospital Association. “The body works very hard to regulate the balance of salt and water,” she says. “If your dog’s behavior changes after swimming in either fresh or salt water, take him to the vet immediately for bloodwork.”

## Blue-Green Algae Poisoning

You should also be aware of potential [blue-green algae poisoning](#) in lakes and ponds. This so-called “algae” is not actually a type of algae but a bacteria known as cyanobacteria. Cyanobacteria isn’t visible to the naked eye, but it often gives the appearance of algae when it clumps together in bodies of water. This bacteria is often found in non-flowing freshwater during hot seasons with little rainfall. Toxic algae can also grow in backyard pools and decorative ponds if they aren’t routinely cleaned.

Toxic algae often stink, sometimes producing a downright nauseating smell, yet animals may be attracted to the smell and taste of them, according to the EPA. Do not let your dogs drink directly from lakes or ponds, especially if you sense the water might have algae. If you suspect your dog has come in contact with the toxins, rinse your dog off with clean water and call your veterinarian immediately.