

# What the dog ate

Lessons in when good dogs eat bad things



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Yeah, look it can be quite a common problem in pups his age," my vet explained. "He's young and silly and a Garbage Guts. Doesn't help that he's a Dalmatian and they have an insatiable appetite. He'll probably grow out of it at some stage but I guess you just have to be vigilant around him."

*Garbage Guts*, that's some kind of medical explanation of what my dog Scooter is? I signed the credit card receipt, waved a cheery farewell to the nice reception and vet nurse staff, loaded the groggy hound in the back of the car and headed for home. That was the end of a surprising Saturday.

It had all started well. A nice early morning walk in the local cemetery—but before you think I might be a Goth or Emo, I'm not. Newtown's oldest cemetery is a very nice place to stroll and is one of the only local areas where dogs can romp freely in a fenced area.

Scooter was having a fun time sniffing the grounds and rolling in the dewy grass. At one point I remember him trotting to the interior of the grounds and spending a great deal of time there. I called him and he eventually came whilst licking his chops. He had eaten something—yet on closer inspection I couldn't find any trace of the normal discarded remains so often found in the grounds.

Common finds are nearly empty coffee cups, some left-over bread or the Holy Grail for most

Newtown dogs—a discarded, foil lined bag that once contained 'Clem's Chicken'. Less than an hour later we were back home and I was busy unloading and loading the dishwasher. Then I noticed something very strange.

The Scoot-man has a weird preference to where and how he sits close to the kitchen. It looks weird but is obviously quite a comfortable position as he parks his bum one step higher than his front feet. That's the way he likes to sit on stairs or a low-to-the-ground couch or dog bed.

Wobbly head—that's what it looked like. I think the correct medical term is 'Course head' but all that means is that the creature looks shaky, wobbly, disorientated. To me, Scooter looked drunk, stoned or 'out of it'. He was sitting there happy enough but wasn't fully present. His head would wobble from side to side and when I called him, he bumped into walls like he had no spatial sense. He had been on a course of drugs to combat a skin complaint and the dosage had recently been increased.

Best to call the vet, I decided. And so I rang to talk to my vet about Scooter's weird behaviour. Immediately the drug dosage increase was ruled out and my vet advised that I go about my business and observe him. If it got worse within the next fifteen minutes or his condition changed then I should call again.

I was on the phone about ten



*“Gone in less than 20 seconds 200g of Tasmanian Heritage Triple Cream Brie.”*

minutes later. “Look, I really know that something’s not right,” I breathlessly explained. “It’s like he’s drunk or stoned or something. He’s happy enough but he’s bumping into furniture and even though he’s seated, it’s like he can’t keep his head straight.”

It was a quick decision on my part to bring him in for a consult and a look over. So by 9:00am, I was driving my way over the Gladesville bridge while a patchy Dalmatian happily sucked in the passing smells and listened to doof doof music whilst trying not to nod off in the back seat.

“He looks fine. Temperature’s normal and he seems happy enough”, explained the vet. “Don’t really see anything wrong with him. BUT...” she paused. “he could have a bit of adrenaline from the excitement of the car drive. That sometimes ‘evens ‘ them up a bit. Makes them seem quite normal even if they’re not. It’s really over to you Lisa. If you want, we can keep him for a while and observe him.”

“Keep him,” I said abruptly. “Keep him because I know that something’s not right”. I was convinced that Scooter had eaten something foul that had affected his motor skills. My befuddled Dalmatian seemed like he was a drunk—all-be-it one of the cutest and happiest drunks I had ever seen.

I didn’t get further than Balmain when my phone buzzed.

“Hello Lisa? Dr X here. Look we’ve all been watching him and it would appear he’s eaten something intoxicating. Not sure yet. Possible in your area that it’s alcohol or junkie vomit—perhaps something nastier.”

“Crap”, I said, just under my breath.

“Yes! Crap indeed. Could be. We’re not sure. I suggest inducing vomiting. It’s pretty nasty and he won’t be feeling the best for the rest of the day but it’s the safest

way of expelling whatever and how much of what he’s consumed out of his body,” explained the vet.

That took me two seconds to consider and so I gave the go ahead for my sweet five-month-old pup to endure the canine equivalent of a stomach pump. I would pick him up at the end of the day, drive him home and keep him quiet.

Like your best high school buddy, I kept Scooter away from more substances, flashy lights and rave music and rested him in a darkened room, letting his head cool on the tile floors. What he ate that day remains a mystery, but all witnesses testified that what came up from the depths of his stomach was dark and foul smelling—akin to the stench found in the pits of hell.

Not so much mystery is the stuff that I’ve found or caught him eating since then. Scootersaurus-Rex (a nickname given by one of his followers on Twitter) is quite the go-getter and risk-taker when it comes to stealing, thieving or sneaking food.

He’s tall for a Dalmatian—not fat but just quite large for the breed. He’s determined that the reward for ‘surfing’ a kitchen counter, far out-weighs the consequence.

The consequence when he was a puppy was me sneaking up on him and clapping loudly by an ear whilst growling “GET DOWN” in my scariest voice. Sure, he got a shock, looked remorseful and bolted out of the kitchen. But the siren song of sweet smelling food left on counter-tops does not deter this dog, even if there is a fright followed by a growly voice and evil stare.

He is Scootersaurus-Rex. A large canine beast that through evolution, has developed strong hindquarters that he can balance on to scour and graze on counter tops. He is both Omnivore and Herbivore and has a

finely-tuned nose for CHEESE.

There are now two tales in Scooter folk-lore that are dubbed the ‘Wheel of Cheese’ and ‘World of Cheese’, respectively. The first occurred when a group of friends came around for drinks and nibbles. I had left a large brie on the kitchen counter to mellow and ripen at room temperature and was tending drinks when a girlfriend raised the alarm. From the backyard she witnessed the lightning fast disappearance of the whole cheese wheel down Scooter’s gullet. Gone in less than 20 seconds 200g of Tasmanian Heritage Triple Cream Brie.

That cheese incident made me more vigilant when entertaining, however the day you let your guard down is the prime opportunity for a cheese thief to spin back into action. Only this time it was a selection of cheese. There was a Morbier from France, a Dutch Gouda, Belgian Feta, Parmigiano from Italy and a frisky goats curd from New Zealand. A moment of distraction and the platter was left with only a few crackers and the Parmigiano intact. Scooter clearly prefers the softer, creamy style cheese or merely believes Italy needs to up its game. This incident is now referred to as the ‘World of Cheese’.

Although not good for any dog’s insides or their cholesterol levels, cheese is a relatively harmless substance to ingest. Much more harmful are the items we never expect them to find, let alone eat.

August last year, I was on deadline for a publication and about to put the finishing organisational touches to a large event the company I work for produces. Pressed for time, all systems around the office were go and there was not much time to even slow down for a cup of tea. But dogs never pick convenient times for

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