

# Water Intoxication/Poisoning - Siryn's Story Could Save Your Dog

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I wanted to share what I learned in case it could help someone else because many people and vets may not have had experience with this. Basically, water intoxication is a potentially fatal disturbance in brain functions that results when the normal balance of electrolytes in the body is pushed outside of safe limits by excessive water consumption in a short period of time. The cells absorb all the water, causing the tissues, including the brain, to swell. When the cell membranes can no longer withstand the pressure, the cells can begin to die. Water intoxication can lead to brain damage, heart failure, and death. The famous artist, Andy Warhol, died from cardiac arrhythmia, a direct result of water intoxication after hospital staff overloaded him with fluids after routine gallbladder surgery. Athletes are also prone to this if they replace lost fluids with large quantities of water without added electrolytes.

I'll list my story below, but please read this for signs and treatment as the vet you end up with may not be as educated as my vet friend was. Early signs of a problem can include mild lethargy, nausea, and slight weight gain resulting in a bloated appearance. Later symptoms, noting that Siryn went from no significant signs to major distress in about 15 minutes, may include neurological signs such as a loss of coordination (tripping, falling, or collapsing), dilated pupils, and glazed eyes or lack of awareness of their surroundings. They may also have difficulty breathing, have an increased heart rate, be restless, have excessive salivation, have poor color in their gums, and even have seizures or slip into a coma.

**TIME IS CRITICAL.** If your dog is showing signs of water intoxication, get them to a vet immediately. The vet needs to run bloodwork and it will show very low electrolytes. Some of the other values, like the kidneys, may be "off", too, but this is a result of the electrolyte imbalance. The vet needs to immediately start the dog on a slow drip of IV sodium chloride fluids and with Siryn, they added potassium to it. The fluids need to be given slowly because the goal is not to hydrate the dog but to slowly put the electrolytes back in the system. Here is another key piece the emergency clinic vet didn't know about that my vet told her to do. Give the dog a diuretic, such as Lasix, to help pull the fluid out of the tissue. I believe this was the key to Siryn recovering to normal bloodwork values in 9-10 hours while another friend's dog with this condition who wasn't given Lasix was in the hospital for 2 days. There are more lessons about dealing with the vets in my story below.

Siryn has been swimming all her life and never had this problem. She does not bite at the water and she does not stand there and gulp down the water. She will sometimes bark or whine in the water because she's so excited and probably takes in water when she does that and I would imagine she also ingests quite a bit of water when she's fetching. I don't know why yesterday was different. My friend saw her vomit up several cups of something that looked like water logged dog food. I have no idea where that came from since she eats raw. Perhaps she found it while we were walking. The only thing I can think of to make this trip different is that the dog food absorbed all the water and didn't let it pass through her system like it normally does, though I'll never know for sure. My vet said she could be more prone to this happening in the future now that it's happened once so I will have to be careful with her, watch her for starting to look

bloated, and make her take breaks.

Here's my story:

Val and I took the dogs swimming and fetching at the lake for an hour or two yesterday evening. When we were done, Siryn looked bloated, but that's normal for her after swimming for a while. She always swallows a lot of water and either vomits it up or urinates a lot for the next couple hours. Val said her face even looked a little bloated yesterday. After swimming, we went for a walk. We'd walked about a mile when I noticed that Siryn wasn't walking right. She was tripping over her feet and starting to lose her balance. Val suggested I put her in the water to see if she was hot but it didn't help. We checked her color and her gums were white. Within minutes, she was having a hard time walking and within a few minutes after that, she couldn't stand at all so I had to carry her. We waited for Val to run back and get the car. Her breathing was raspy and labored, she was panting heavily, she started excessively salivating, and she couldn't stand or sit. Her eyes were glazed and her pupils were dilated.

We rushed her to the emergency clinic where the technician was so not good. She checked Siryn out, saw her have no color to her gums, unable to stand, panting, with dilated eyes, and told us she would put us in a room for a while until the doctor could see us. Val said she checked her own pulse instead of Siryn's! I told her the doctor either needed to see my dog (who still couldn't stand up!) right away or I was going to take her and find a vet who would see her. She said she'd take her to the back and maybe put her on oxygen or something (not helpful). Apparently, when the doctor saw her, she recognized she was in shock and started treating her immediately.

I think not all, but a lot of the vets who work the night and weekend shifts at the emergency clinics are new in practice (who else wants to work weekend overnights?!) and may not have a lot of experience. This vet figured out to put her on slow fluids with the additives, but it took having my awesome vet (thanks Laura Beth!) calling her to suggest Lasix to really get the ball rolling. The emergency vet also was thinking perhaps Siryn had Addison's Disease based on her bloodwork but my vet was able to tell her that she's known Siryn all her life and she's never shown any signs of that and that she needed to just treat her for water intoxication and stop looking for other things that it could be.

Siryn was groaning while she was lying on the table and the vet asked me if she normally did that. I told her no and she started saying that it might be a sign of something else and we might need to do x-rays. I told her that Siryn was probably miserable because she was so fat at that time from all the water in her body. She looked at me and asked, incredulously, "This is fat for her?" It was kind of laughable because Siryn is an in shape competition dog and very thin compared to the fat pet dogs most vets are used to seeing. So what was obvious to me as discomfort from severe bloating she didn't see because Siryn looked like the normal weight of dogs she was used to seeing!

Remember, you and your vet know your dog and the emergency vets don't! You have to be ready to speak up, demand an immediate assessment by a doctor if you don't feel the entry staff are giving you proper attention, and educate them about what is and isn't normal for your dog (like the lack of Addison's symptoms and the groaning from being bloated). If she would have started treating for Addison's, we could have gone in the whole wrong direction. I am so lucky my wonderful vet was willing to call up there late in the night and make sure Siryn got the appropriate care.

So, that's my story. Since posting this yesterday, I have heard from several other people who

have had dogs have this or who know people who have. I hope this helps educate everyone on a potential problem many don't know exist. I sincerely hope this note won't discourage people from taking their dogs to the water to have fun. Siryn will still go swimming because it's her favorite thing to do and I refuse to keep my dogs in a glass bubble just because something might happen. We are fortunate to have every day we have with each other and I want my dogs to love their life; however, I will be more educated in the future about making each trip as safe as possible.