

## **THE GULPIES - Meryl P. Littman, VMD, DACVIM**

Professor Emerita of Medicine,  
University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine  
Email: [merylitt@vet.upenn.edu](mailto:merylitt@vet.upenn.edu)

The "gulpies" as I know the term from the description of many owners and breeders, and videos sent to me, is often associated with GI (gastrointestinal) reflux, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), and food allergies (all of which Wheatens are predisposed to getting). The signs are suggestive of a possible association with a transient abnormal positioning of the pharyngeal and laryngeal structures (soft palate and epiglottis) with stimulation of cranial nerve IX (glossopharyngeal nerve) and/or cranial nerve X (vagus nerve), and/or irritation of the esophagus with stimulation of the phrenic nerve.

Sometimes the dogs get into a paroxysmal or spasmodic uncontrollable/involuntary bout of gulps/gags/coughs/retches, etc., almost like a burst of repetitive violent hiccups, until they can clear their pharynx or esophagus of some offending material. This may take several minutes. Eating roughage or fiber (leaves, rugs, towels, etc.) may be a way of 'clearing their throat'. I usually put these dogs on antacids (e.g., an H2 blocker such as famotidine or a PPI such as omeprazole), motility modifiers (e.g., metoclopramide), strictly hypoallergenic diets (I have a list I recommend), and I stop any chews, bones, bully sticks, jerkies, rawhides, ears, antlers, hooves, etc. Some owners have asked about using 'slippery elm' in these cases. I have no clinical experience with its use, and I don't know its efficacy, safety, or possible side effects, e.g., whether slippery elm (which is a demulcent and soluble fiber) might change the absorption of other oral medications given. Sometimes having the gulpies is a precursor for more severe IBD, PLE (protein-losing enteropathy), and/or pancreatitis. These GI predispositions do not have any DNA tests available yet (whereas we do have the DNA test for the PLN (protein-losing nephropathy)- associated variant alleles). I don't know if dogs with gulpies are predisposed to other problems that Wheatens are predisposed genetically for, such as Addison's disease (typical or atypical) or renal dysplasia (juvenile renal disease), and if these are found, they may be just coincidentally concurrent and not necessarily associated or causative.

Please share this article with your vet if your dog suffers from the gulpies or GI reflux. Realize that they are the best ones to help you, since they have examined your dog and I haven't. Here in this article I am talking very generally. Your dog may have other problems if they have GI troubles. If an owner wants a more individualized consultation, I would need to see the history, full medical files, test results, etc. Of course getting a consult in person from an internist nearby would be better, so I'm never offended if owners take that route. You can go to [www.acvim.org](http://www.acvim.org) and find a DACVIM, SAIM (small animal internal medicine) specialist near you.

Best wishes and take care.

Meryl