

# MEMBER CLUBS REPORT



YANKEE GOLDEN RETRIEVER CLUB

## WATER INTOXICATION

by Donna Morgan

Is it possible for a human or dog to drink too much water, which could cause a dangerous health issue? The answer, much to my surprise, is yes! Something we have always been told is vital to our being — water — can also kill us and our dogs when the intake is in excess. It's called water intoxication. The challenge, of course, is determining what is "in excess." I wish to share my frightening experience only to educate, with the hope that this information will make you aware, cautious, and ultimately help you avoid a disaster.

Ever since he was a puppy, my dog, "Frost," would drink water when he swam. He would drink as he swam out for a mark and would also drink when he swam back with his bird in his mouth. I joked that he "drank on the job." He has done this all his life, throughout all his training. He even does this when swimming for fun. Many times he would return from a triple retrieve and a double blind with a belly very full of water. I have always been very cautious and diligent to make sure Frost did not bloat from swimming. I would walk him slowly, burp him, let him rest and always make sure he could relieve himself 20 minutes after his last swim. Because of his "drinking behavior," I felt it best for him not to have a field trial

career.

Several weeks ago I was doing a little training with Frost and our training buddies — nothing unusual, distances that he has done often. I monitored his water intake, as always. After training, we took about half an hour to clean up and spend time chatting. Suddenly I realized Frost was having a seizure in his crate.

As a training group, we sprang into action. We thought Frost might have been overheating, so we packed him with ice from a cooler, put the air conditioning on as cool as it would go, and headed to the 24-hour emergency clinic. Unfortunately I didn't know where it was, but my friend did so I followed.

The service and care we received at the emergency clinic was outstanding! I explained Frost's activities and that he drank water when he swam. He had done about 800–1000 yards over the course of two hours. The vet listened carefully and then ran tests. Through blood work and a chest x-ray, it was discovered that Frost's sodium, potassium, and chloride levels were dangerously low. These low levels occur when too much water enters the body's cells, and the tissues then swell with the excess fluid. Cells maintain a specific concentration gradient, so excess water outside the cells draws sodium from within the cells out into the serum in the body's attempt to re-establish the necessary concentration. As more water accumulates, the serum sodium concentration drops — a condition known as hyponatremia. This can cause seizures and swelling on the brain. Treatment was a diuretic to relieve the water and to let the body's sodium and other levels

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return to normal on their own.

Frost is fine now and healthy, thanks to the superb medical care he received. He's now allowed to swim no more than 50 yards under careful observation. He is now lovingly known as a land shark. He can go long only on land.

I tell the story to educate, because we truly don't know why or when too much water can be dangerous. The distances Frost did that day were not out of the ordinary for him and other dogs. Dogs who drink water while they swim are not unusual. We must carefully watch our beloved Golden Retrievers as they swim. We don't know how much water is too much. I've learned that bloat from water intake is not the only enemy! Human athletes and infants on formula, too, must be careful. A Boston marathon runner lost her life this year due to water intoxication. Infant formulas may be too diluted and, therefore, can cause seizures.

My second lesson learned: when training, I will now always know where the nearest 24-hour veterinary clinics and hospitals are located. I can't tell you how much my friends helped in this situation! But, many times I train alone. When training alone we should always have a plan on how we can get our dog or our self out of the woods, water or field in case we need help. Carry your cell phone with you. Hey, maybe I should get a smart phone. They have apps for everything!

You can get more information regarding water intoxication on the Internet. Please stay safe and enjoy your every minute with your dogs and your friends! ❖