

Points to remember

- Don't give your cat a human preparation without consulting with your veterinarian.
- Feed your cat a balanced diet and avoid fatty table scraps.
- Many cats are Lactose Intolerant and so milk products may cause problems.
- A full range of good quality diets are available through our clinic, from diets for growth through to diets for aged care. Diets for delicate digestion and in convalescence are also available. Ask one of our staff for assistance in choosing the product you need.

Client information series

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diarrhoea in cats

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General information

Most cats defaecate outside and bury their motions, so diarrhoea may be present for some time before owners are aware of it. It is only if the cat toilets in the house or soils the fur around the anus that the diarrhoea becomes apparent. Cat faeces should ordinarily be the consistency of soft putty, so faeces that are more liquid are not normal. If there is more than one cat in the household, it may be difficult to decide which cat has the problem.

Diarrhoea is not a disease in itself but a symptom of many diseases. It may be specific and related to factors such as diet, or part of a more widespread illness associated with bacterial, viral, parasitic or cancer.

Clinical symptoms and history

To decide on the possible cause and appropriate treatment for your cat, it is necessary to try and determine whether the diarrhoea is acute or chronic. Any information relating to the time the problem has been present is very important. Other clinical signs to note and mention would be lethargy, appearance of illness, weight loss, vomiting and appetite. It is important that we have an accurate idea of diet, worming frequency, changes in the household, whether the cat is a hunter, and

if any other cats in the house are also affected. Any changes in the toileting habits of the cat, and changes in the consistency, colour and frequency of defaecation are extremely important.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Most cases of diarrhoea are mild but sometimes the condition is severe enough to cause weakness and dehydration or is a symptom of a severe underlying disease process.

Mild cases with no other signs of illness will often respond to symptomatic treatment with probiotics, mucosal protective agents and bland diet.

With severe cases, recurrent cases or persistent cases it may be necessary to do some pathology tests to pinpoint an accurate diagnosis. This could include blood and faecal analysis, radiographs and ultrasound examination. In the worst refractory cases it may be necessary to take intestinal biopsy samples under general anaesthetic to establish the diagnosis. There is no way of guaranteeing that the tests above will lead to a conclusion, and sometimes a series of treatment trials monitoring response can be more helpful and less invasive for the cat.

It is important to remember never to give human preparations to your cat without first consulting your veterinarian, as many of these products may be fatal to cats.

Diet intolerances are one of the most common causes of diarrhoea in cats. This may be present from a kitten (e.g. Lactose intolerance), or develop over years. The food involved does not have to be an unusual food for the cat. It is usually something they have eaten frequently in the past but at some point the immune system decides it no longer tolerates this food and so an allergic type response is created. This frequently takes the form of chronic or recurrent diarrhoea. There are now a range of foods developed that are more digestible, less allergenic and often better tolerated by the cats concerned.

Irritable bowel is also frequently seen in cats. These cats respond best to cortisone medication and dietary alterations. In most cases this is an immune mediated disease process and is not curable.

Bacterial infections causing diarrhea are not a frequent cause of diarrhea in cats unless contaminated food has been eaten. There are several viral diseases which cause severe diarrhea, and kittens that are stressed or underfed may develop coccidial diarrhoea. Kittens may also have enough worms to cause diarrhoea and signs of ill thrift.