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VOMITING IN CATS

We all know that cats will vomit at the drop of a hat. Sometimes the vomiting is of little consequence, other times it is a signal to go looking for something more serious. Vomiting hairballs is a normal event for cats. They should be occasional and you should easily be able to see the hairball. Some cats will vomit whenever they eat plants. If that is the only time they vomit, it may be of little concern. Transient irritations, like viruses, unwholesome food or intestinal parasites may also cause episodes of vomiting and may be easily dealt with by medication or diet changes.

Some cats will eat a lot of food at one time and, in essence, regurgitate. If you know that your cat will eat a large volume of food and promptly deposit it on the floor, you can try to slow down how fast they eat. Making an obstacle course for them to eat around can be effective. Take a cookie sheet and put cans or upside down bowls on it and sprinkle the food around these objects. That sometimes slows them down enough so that their stomach can handle the food that gets into it.

Cats that have been vomiting for months or years can be trying to tell us something. Vomiting isn't a disease itself, it's a sign of disease. Sometimes there can be a problem that involves another organ, like the kidneys, liver, or thyroid glands. The malfunction of one of these organ systems can result in changes in the body that will make the cat vomit. A very common problem is a general inflammation of the stomach and intestines. It is called Inflammatory Bowel Disease and can cause not only vomiting but also changes the stool.

When we see your cat for vomiting we will try to find out if the vomiting is long-term or short-term. We will ask questions to try to figure out what kind of vomiting is going on, because, believe it or not, there are different kinds. We will try to advise you about whether the vomiting may be something simple or if we are concerned that it may indicate a more serious problem. We will probably talk about what we can do to get an idea about why the vomiting is occurring so we can treat it more effectively. For chronic vomiting cats we will recommend a blood test that checks organ function and blood cell counts. We will also recommend testing for Feline Leukemia Virus and the Feline Immunodeficiency first. If our tests come up negative then we may talk about the pros and cons of trying to diagnose the problem in the intestine by taking an actual sample or biopsy.

During this process, we will probably be using medication and making suggestions that will symptomatically help to control the vomiting. But usually we can't get to the root of the problem without doing our diagnostic tests. But once we know what we are dealing with, our treatment can be more specific and effective.