

## VOMITING AND YOUR CAT

*When is it a problem and what to expect when we work it up?*

*Vomiting is when your cat brings up anything. That means hairballs, undigested food or any kind of fluid. Plants are going to make many cats vomit too.*

*Vomiting 1 - 2 times a month can be normal. More often than that should be addressed.*

### **When is it a problem?**

If your cat vomits 1-2 times a month, feels good and keeps eating and acting OK, its probably fine. But there may be trouble if vomiting episodes increase and you find your cat vomiting weekly or every few days. There also may be trouble if your cat feels puny with the vomiting episodes, even if they are infrequent.

Does your cat vomit for a couple of days, then is OK for a few weeks and cycles like that month after month? Episodic bouts of vomiting can be a footprint of trouble.

Does your cat frequently vomit after "he eats too fast or too much"? There's a problem with GI motility, not bulimia.

### **What does it mean?**

Vomiting is a vague sign and can mean a lot of things. Maybe the cause is environmental and easy to correct, like taking away the salad bar and moving all the plants. Sometimes you can control vomiting by how you feed your cat. Make an obstacle course to slow a cat down enough so that their stomach can more easily handle what they eat. Try taking a cookie sheet and put cans or upside down bowls on it and sprinkle the food around these objects.

Maybe an intestinal parasite is present and a simple deworming can take care of it. Maybe it's from a diseased thyroid gland, kidney problems or heartworm disease. And unfortunately, sometimes, maybe it's even cancer.

But about 50% of the time, it's because of an immune response in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract that causes all sorts of stuff to happen in a smoldering, insidious way. Some cats just vomit, make stains on your carpet, and that's as far as it goes. Other cats get sicker from the messed up GI tract. They don't absorb their nutrients very well and may have compromised motility. Stuff just doesn't know which way to go and up it comes.

Some cats' problems don't just stop at their intestines. Many cats with this immune response problem called Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) have the same disease process happening in the liver and pancreas, and maybe other places too. IBD sets cats up for a lot of problems. We really worry about the cats that have sudden onset of malaise along with nausea or vomiting.

### **How are we going to find out what's going on?**

There's just no way around the fact that we need to do a bunch of tests to try to define what's happening. We will ask to do a blood chemistry, complete blood count, thyroid function, leukemia/FIV test, heartworm test and urinalysis. We'll probably talk about treating for parasites too, to rule that out. We may talk about food changes and do trials with some symptomatic medications. Trying to figure out what's going on is like working on a puzzle. We like to think of it as looking under rocks for clues. If we don't find the information we need under the first few rocks, we need to keep looking until we have enough information for you to help your cat. That may mean fancier blood test, x-rays or a sonogram. Sometimes it means actually getting a biopsy of the GI tract.

### **OK, So I did all the stuff I was advised to do. How are you going to make a difference?**

Getting a better definition of the problem lets us give you a better treatment plan. If your cat has IBD, we're going to treat with medicine to decrease inflammation, address the fact that nutrients probably aren't getting absorbed, and change the diet. The weird diets we'll talk about can sometimes help slow down the immune response. When we control the inflammation in your cat's GI tract, we may decrease the likelihood that those inflammatory cells turn into cancer cells.

Exactly what we do depends on the diagnosis from all those tests. We know this is a lot to take in and it's a complicated problem with lots of angles. But the better you understand it, the better choices you can make.