



Vomiting in Dogs and Cats Fact Sheet

Vomiting is the forceful expulsion of the stomach contents through the mouth.

What can cause vomiting in cats and dogs?

There is a long and diverse list of conditions that can cause cat and dog vomiting. Generally, they are divided into gastrointestinal disorders (i.e. conditions primarily affecting the gut such as gastritis), and non-gastrointestinal disorders. Examples of non-gastrointestinal disorders include liver disease and kidney disease.

What is 'acute' vomiting?

Acute vomiting is characterised by signs of cat and dog vomiting being recent in onset (acute) and not associated with other clinical signs. In most cases, treatment often involves supportive care such as fluid therapy, often a short period of food withdrawal and a subsequent period of feeding a 'light' diet. When more severe signs are apparent or simple treatment fails to resolve the problem, further investigations may be indicated.

What is 'chronic' vomiting?

When vomiting persists for a period (typically more than three or four weeks) it is termed 'chronic' and this is a common point at which further investigations are considered.

Why can the colour of vomit vary?

Vomit can vary in appearance ranging from food, white frothy foam to bile (which is yellow). Sometimes the vomit can look like brown coffee granules, this suggests ulceration and bleeding in the stomach. If coffee granules are seen in the vomit a veterinary surgeon should be contacted for advice.

How do you investigate patients with vomiting?

A wide variety of investigations are used to diagnose the cause of cat and dog vomiting and to determine the best therapy. Initial blood tests are used to rule out a number of non-gastrointestinal diseases. There are specific blood tests that can also be used to evaluate for intestinal disease and pancreatitis. Diagnostic imaging (e.g. radiography, ultrasonography) can be used to non-invasively examine the architecture of the stomach and related organs. Endoscopy is often used to view inside of the stomach and upper intestines. Biopsy forceps can be passed down the endoscope to allow pinch biopsies to be taken. Sometimes surgical exploration is necessary to perform procedures such as foreign body removal.

What treatments are available?

Due to the numerous causes of cat and dog vomiting, there are a number of treatments available. In patients with gastrointestinal disease, diet and anti acids therapy play a major role in treatment of cases referred to Davies Veterinary Specialists (**see Fact Sheet: Feeding an exclusion diet**). A number of other specific medical treatments may also be used for non-gastrointestinal disorders.

Will my pet get better?

The likely outcome depends upon a number of factors. Most important is the underlying disease; certain diseases are considered very difficult to treat and carry a poor prognosis. More optimistically, many of the cases we see achieve significant improvements as long as treatment (diet and/or drugs) are maintained.

If you are concerned about the health of your pet you should contact your veterinary surgeon.

Related factsheets

Feeding an Exclusion Diet