

Transcript:

“Why Cats Throw Up”

Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker, and today we're going to discuss why cats throw up. Many cats throw up a lot. In fact, this is a very common discussion in the Healthy Pets forum. We'll be going over some of the basic reasons why cats throw up, so you can check them off your list and hone in on potential reasons why your cat throws up and address it with your veterinarian.

Keep in mind that there are lots of reasons why cats throw up. There's not one cause of vomiting. Sometimes people would e-mail me and ask, “Why is my cat throwing up?” This is a pretty long list, so this video will help you discern which one of these issues is going on in your cat.

The Role of Diet

The first place to look at is diet. Your cat could be eating poor-quality, rendered diet. This means proteins that are not approved for human consumption, and consist of leftovers from slaughterhouses. Sometime bird feathers, beaks, skin, hooves, eyes, and heads – although considered protein – could be difficult for digestion and assimilation and can result in vomiting.

Some pets or cats develop allergies to their food. In fact, this is a common reason for intermittent vomiting over a long period of time. If you have cats that act great, don't lose weight, don't act sick, look wonderful and just intermittently throw up, you need to be thinking about a food allergy.

Food allergies come about when we feed our cats the same food over and over. Some people would say, “But my cat won't eat anything else.” Most of us end up feeding the same cat food over and over, not because we don't know better, but because cats don't want to eat other foods. There are many cats in my practice that are seafood and poultry junkies. They get hooked onto seafood or poultry, and when you try to feed them another protein source, they want nothing to do with it.

You can create some nutritional variety through trickery -- we have videos on how to convert your cat to eating a different protein source. You might want to consider watching them. It is important that if your cat's vomiting, you address diet as a central cause. This is because feeding the same type of protein – even if it's excellent-quality, human-grade – can certainly

result in gastrointestinal inflammation or food allergies. The symptom in your cat can ultimately be vomiting.

You need to consider not only quality, but also how often you're switching proteins sources to find the potential culprit. Oftentimes at my practice, we have people feeding phenomenal-quality food, and then they feed really trashy treats to their cats.

If you read the back of your cat treats and it contains propylene glycol, FDC red #4, a whole host of words that you can't pronounce, like ethoxyquin, or if there are chemical dyes or emulsifiers or surfactants -- anything on the label that you can't pronounce -- don't feed it to your cat. That can be a cause of GI inflammation and, in turn, vomiting in your cat.

Last but not the least is milk. All mammals will probably drink milk. But it's important that if you're going to consume milk, it should be from the same species. This is because you can have gastrointestinal issues if you are nursing from a different species.

The problem with cats is that they don't have the appropriate enzymes to break down the milk sugar in cow's milk. Cats' pancreases don't secrete the lactase necessary to break down the lactose found in cow's milk, and this can lead to secondary GI symptoms including vomiting.

Our remedy for the potential dietary aspect of intermittent vomiting would be to switch your cat to human-grade canned food. If you're on human-grade canned food, slowly transition your cat on to raw food. Every three months, consider rotating different protein sources to avoid potential food allergies.

Is Your Cat A Gobbler?

Another common reason why cats throw up is that they're gobblers. If you have competition in your home among cats, this is a very common reason, especially if you're portion-feeding your cats. You put them on a diet so that they don't gain weight, and you put down their portion in the morning. You'll see one of your kitties eat really fast, and maybe go over and see if the buddy doesn't eat as fast, because maybe they can eat both portions if they hurry up and eat.

If you see competition happening in your house, you need to split the cats up so they can't see or hear the other cat eat. Put one in the kitchen, the other in the bedroom. Put down their portion, give them 20 minutes to be able to consume their food in a slower fashion, and pick the bowls up.

If you have a single cat that's still a gobbler, you may need to split the meals into tiny amounts of food, with a bite every hour or a couple of hours to help slow down how quickly your cat wants to gobble his or her food.

Cats, of course, are quadrupeds; their esophagus is horizontal, instead of vertical. Foods can slap against their lower esophageal sphincter and can cause regurgitation of whole, undigested food sometimes several minutes after they eat. Slowing down gobbling will help.

Hydrochloric Acid in the Stomach

Food timing is another reason why cats will throw up. Let's say you're portion- or schedule-feeding your cats, and they know that they're going to be fed at 6 in the morning and 8 at night. Sometimes at 5 in the morning, your cat will come, wake you up, and say it's time to eat. During that time, your cat is anticipating food and is going to be releasing hydrochloric acid, bile, and gastric juices to be able to process the food.

Let's say, you get delayed; food doesn't come at 6 o'clock, and you end up feeding your cat at 7 o'clock. There's a very good chance that she will throw up, vomit some white foam and maybe a little bit of yellow stain (bile). The cat will act fine and still excited to eat. But what happens is that strong hydrochloric acid irritates the lining of the tummy. No food has entered the stomach, so she throws up the hydrochloric acid to avoid additional irritation.

In those situations, give your cat a treat. If you know that your cat's prone to vomiting just before meals, give your kitty a treat right when you wake up and when you're home from work and your cat's asking for dinner. This is a good time to give a treat, to put something in her stomach to help absorb the hydrochloric acid and decrease gastrointestinal irritation.

Enzyme Deficiency

Another reason for vomiting is enzyme deficiency. Cats sometimes don't produce adequate lipase, protease, and amylase from their pancreas, and so pancreatic insufficiency can lead to chronic or acute low-grade pancreatitis. Pancreatitis or inflammation of the pancreas is very common in cats. In fact, we're finding as veterinarians that it's a lot more common than what we assumed as the underlying root cause of intermittent vomiting.

Adding a digestive enzyme assures you that if your cat's pancreas is properly producing enzymes, adding additional enzymes to the food is not a problem. If, by chance, your pet's pancreas is not secreting digestive enzymes, supplying enzymes to the food is a great way to assure that your cat is going to have adequate enzymes to process the meal that you've just fed her.

Cat Hairballs

Hairballs are another big reason why cats will vomit. If you're unsure about your cat dealing with hairballs, you should know that hairballs are cylindrical vomitus that comes out kind of as a plug. Oftentimes there's a clear pool of fluid or water around it. With cats that have high-

maintenance or long hair, you need to facilitate the reduction of the amount of hair your cat is eating by brushing your cat.

Brushing all the cats at home is a good idea. Oftentimes there's one overgroomer, so that one kitty will groom herself and all the other cats at home with over four times the amount of hair that the GI tract is designed to process. You can facilitate hair passage with a pinch of fiber or a petroleum-free hair remedy on the market that you can consider.

Brushing and shaving down really hairy cats that eat a tremendous amount of hair will dramatically reduce the amount of hairballs that your cat is having.

Other Reasons Why Cats Throw Up

There are some more significant reasons why cats throw up. Poisoning, unfortunately, is a very common reason for sudden vomiting in cats. So if you have a cat that's a non-barfer but starts barfing, you need to be concerned about your cat ingesting something that could be toxic.

Common household toxicities include plants. If you have a cat that desires to eat plants, she probably is lacking raw food supply in their diet. Cats, by nature, don't want to eat your house plant. They don't have house plant deficiency; they have raw food deficiency. Supplying cat grass (wheat grass) is one way to offer some living foods to help decrease the amount of potential toxins that your cat might get from eating houseplants.

In addition to plants, there could be herbicides, pesticides, or household cleaners that cats could ingest and cause vomiting.

If you believe that your cat is poisoned or could be ingesting something that's toxic, you need to call the ASPCA Poison Control hotline at 888-426-4435.

In addition to toxicosis, cats can sometimes vomit because they have inflammatory bowel disease, the big umbrella in which irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), gastritis, enteritis, colitis, and pancreatitis fall under. Chronic GI inflammation in cats – chronic, low-grade vomiting – can lead to gastrointestinal lymphoma, a form of GI cancer than can cause cats to vomit as well.

Metabolic issues such as hyperthyroidism can often upregulate a cat's metabolism and cause her to throw up. Organ disease or an impaired organ of detoxification: if you have kidney or liver inflammation or damage going on in your pet, you can see vomiting occurring secondary to metabolic issues or organ disease.

Functional Gastrointestinal Tests for your Cat

All this says that cats who throw up are not normal. It's very important that I stress that to you. I can't say the number of times that people come to me and say, "No, my local vet says it's fine

for my cat to throw up.” The only animals that should vomit regularly are vultures. Vultures vomit as a built-in self-defense mechanism. The only animals that get a pass for barfing regularly are vultures. Cats – and any other mammal for that matter – should not be throwing up on a regular basis.

It’s important that if you have a vomiting cat, ask your veterinarian about some of these potential causes. You should first rule out the big, scary things like hyperthyroidism and organ disease, and then you can consider asking for a functional gastrointestinal test, the blood draw that’s sent to Texas A & M gastrointestinal lab. They can help discern if the cat’s dealing with malabsorption and maldigestion, or if there’s a small intestinal disease happening in your pet and could be creating this situation of unexplained vomiting.

Most importantly and whatever you do, don’t allow your veterinarian to just offer drugs that suppress the vomiting or the symptoms without addressing the underlying root cause.