

# All About Diarrhea – The Best Secrets for Treating It at Home

Cats and dogs show different signs when they have tummy troubles, and diarrhea is something they both experience. Know the 12 things that can cause loose stools and when to seek your veterinarian's care.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- When cats have digestive troubles, they more often vomit than have diarrhea, but they do occasionally get diarrhea as well
- Unless your cat's episode of diarrhea is a "one and done" type of thing, you should give your veterinarian a call, as there are many causes of diarrhea in cats, and several of them are quite serious
- In otherwise healthy kitties, a sudden dietary change can trigger a bout of diarrhea. To improve digestive function and overall health, it's best to vary your cat's diet rather than feed the same food all the time
- To treat a transient episode of diarrhea at home, a short-term fast followed by a bland diet of cooked, fat-free turkey and 100% canned pumpkin is recommended
- There are also several homeopathic remedies that can be very beneficial for intermittent diarrhea depending on your pet's specific symptoms, including nux vomica, veratrum, podophyllum, arsenicum album, and china

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published April 25, 2017.***

When it comes to tummy problems in pets, the general rule is that dogs tend to have lower gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms and diarrhea, whereas cats tend to have upper GI tract issues and vomiting. But with that said, cats can and do develop diarrhea under certain circumstances.

## Root Causes of Diarrhea in Cats

The causes of loose stools in cats are numerous and varied, and include:

- Dietary indiscretion
- Food allergies
- Hyperthyroidism
- Sudden change in diet
- Ingestion of foreign bodies
- Viral and bacterial infections
- Giardia, Tritrichomonas foetus
- Pancreatitis

- Stress
- Inflammatory disease
- Immune-mediated disease
- Cancer

If your kitty has a once-in-a-blue-moon bout of loose stools that resolves within a day or two, chances are she ate something that disagreed with her (or you gave her milk, which is a common culprit in feline digestive issues) and there's nothing to worry about.

However, since there are many serious feline diseases that have diarrhea as a symptom, if your cat (or any pet) is experiencing chronic or recurrent diarrhea, it's time to make an appointment with your veterinarian.

Dehydration is an immediate and life-threatening concern, especially for kittens, petite adult cats and kitties who are seniors or geriatric, or have a chronic illness.

Also, if the diarrhea is accompanied by other signs of illness such as blood in the stool, vomiting, loss of appetite and/or fever, it's definitely a sign your pet is ill and you should seek veterinary care.

I recommend you collect a quarter-size bit of poop on, for example, a stiff piece of cardboard, and slip it into a plastic baggie. Otherwise, your veterinarian may have to manually extract a sample, which will make your already uncomfortable kitty that much more so.

Your vet will probably do bloodwork in addition to evaluating the stool to determine if there's infection present. He or she should also treat your pet for dehydration if necessary, with IV (intravenous) or SQ (subcutaneous) fluids.

Two fecal tests should be performed. One checks for parasite antigens and/or eggs, and the other checks for bacterial or viral agents that cause diarrhea.

## Have You Changed Kitty's Diet?

In otherwise healthy cats, often it's a sudden change in diet that triggers a bout of diarrhea, and this is especially true for kitties who eat the same food every day. If you feed your cat the same diet day after day, month after month, year in and year out, then suddenly switch to a new food, a case of diarrhea is just about guaranteed.

There's nothing wrong with the new food, it's just that kitty's gut is conditioned to expect only one type of food, which is not ideal, nutritionally or physiologically. Cats fed a varied diet have stronger, more resilient GI tracts and can typically eat different foods regularly without a problem.

After your pet's stools have returned to normal, begin varying kitty's diet to include a range of foods with different nutrient contents. This will promote a diversified gut microbiome and make her digestive system strong and resilient.

However, you need to make the transition very slowly, as in, over a period of weeks to months. Start with 10% new food blended with 90% old food for several days.

Watch your pet's stool and if all seems well, move to 20% new/80% old. Keep watching for stool changes and if none occur, move to 30% new food and 70% old, and so on, until you're feeding only the new diet.

The process should be slow enough that no bowel changes occur. During the transition period, it's very important to insure your kitty is eating every day, as cats can't go without food for long or they risk developing fatty liver disease.

## Treating Diarrhea at Home

If your cat is otherwise healthy and his behavior is normal, it's best to withhold food — not water, just food — for 12 hours. A short-term fast gives the GI tract a chance for some R&R. Tissues can only heal when they're resting.

Follow the 12-hour food fast with a bland diet. Feed cooked, fat-free ground turkey and 100% canned pumpkin. Try starting with an 80% turkey/20% pumpkin blend. If canned pumpkin isn't available, you can use fresh, steamed pumpkin or cooked sweet potato.

Skip the outdated advice to feed ground beef and rice and go with this recommendation instead. Even lean ground beef is high in fat, which can exacerbate kitty's tummy troubles, and rice is a starchy, pro-inflammatory carbohydrate that often provides zero nutrition or calories for animals with digestive issues.

Canned 100% pumpkin provides about 80 calories and 7 grams of soluble fiber per cup, compared to 1.2 grams of fiber in a cup of cooked white rice. The soluble fiber in pumpkin coats and soothes the GI tract, and also delays gastric emptying.

When animals have diarrhea, they can lose important electrolytes, including potassium, which puts them at risk of dehydration. Hypokalemia, or low potassium levels, can result in cramping, fatigue, weakness and heart rate irregularities.

Pumpkin happens to be an excellent source of potassium, with 505 milligrams of naturally occurring potassium per cup. Pumpkin is also safer for diabetic pets than rice.

And most animals love it, including cats. Feed the bland diet to your pet until the diarrhea resolves. If it doesn't clear up in about three days, it's time to call your veterinarian.

Keeping some slippery elm on hand is also recommended. Slippery elm is a neutral fiber source that works really well to ease episodes of diarrhea. It's sometimes called "nature's Pepto-Bismol" because it reduces GI inflammation and acts as a non-irritating source of fiber to bulk up the stool and slow down GI transit time.

Give your cat about a half teaspoon or a capsule for each 10 pounds of body weight with every bland meal. Add in a good-quality probiotic once the stool starts to firm up. In addition to slippery elm and **probiotics**, many pet owners have good luck with herbs such as peppermint, fennel or chamomile. These are especially helpful for the cramping and other uncomfortable GI symptoms that come with diarrhea.

There are also several homeopathic remedies that can be very beneficial for intermittent diarrhea depending on your pet's specific symptoms, including nux vomica, veratrum, podophyllum, arsenicum album, and china.

# Sources and References

WZZM 13 January 19, 2017

