

Diarrhoea in cats

Overview

There are many conditions that cause diarrhoea in cats, ranging from minor to serious. Mild cases of diarrhoea usually pass within 24 hours. Treatment from a vet is necessary if diarrhoea is making your cat poorly or if it isn't quickly getting better on its own.

Treatment for diarrhoea depends on the cause. It's rare for a cat with diarrhoea to need antibiotics and in some cases it can even make the problem worse.

How will I know if my cat has diarrhoea?

It can be difficult to notice diarrhoea in our feline friends – especially if they share a litter tray with another cat or they go to the toilet outdoors. Look out for the following clues that your cat may have diarrhoea:

- Popping outside very regularly
- Using their litter tray very regularly
- Excessive bottom cleaning
- A general smell about them
- Straining to poo
- A red, sore bottom

Causes of diarrhoea in cats

Food related

- Eating something they shouldn't have
- After a sudden change in food

- A food allergy

Gut infections

- Bacterial gut infections
- Parasites e.g. Worms, Giardia, Cryptosporidium or Tritrichomonas (especially in young cats)
- Viruses such as Feline Panleucopenia Virus, Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) or Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP virus)

Other causes of diarrhoea

- Pancreatitis
- Gut blockage
- Intussusception (guts turning in on themselves)
- Liver disease
- Kidney disease

When to contact your vet

If your cat seems well in themselves a short bout of diarrhoea (lasting less than 24 hours) isn't usually anything to worry about. However, if diarrhoea continues for longer than 24 hours or is particularly severe (see below) it can cause dehydration and more serious illness. In cases of more severe diarrhoea you should always contact your vet.

Severe diarrhoea symptoms

- Watery diarrhoea
- Bloody diarrhoea
- Diarrhoea on-and-off for two weeks or more
- Constant diarrhoea for more than 24 hours
- Diarrhoea and other health issues
- Diarrhoea while taking medications especially non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or steroids

- Is a young kitten or an elderly cat with diarrhoea
- Sleeping more than usual
- Eating less
- Not drinking normally
- Vomiting as well as diarrhoea
- Painful abdomen (stomach) for example if they cry or swipe when they are picked up or when you touch near their tummy or if they are looking hunched

You know your cat best. If you are concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Home care for cats with diarrhoea

Mild cases of diarrhoea often pass within 24 hours. Book an appointment with your vet if your cat doesn't improve within this time or if you are concerned about them at any point. If your cat has a mild case of diarrhoea but is otherwise happy, well and behaving normally you could try to settle them at home.

Keep them eating

- Don't withhold food from your cat. Offer them small meals regularly to keep their guts moving.
- Don't give your cat anything rich or fatty – this could make their diarrhoea much worse.
- Plain boiled chicken (without skin or bones) can be used in the very short term and bland diets are also available from the vet.
- Take your cat to the vet if they stop eating at any point.

Gradually reintroduce their normal food

- Your cat should be back to normal after a couple of days.
- Once they're passing solid poo you can start to reintroduce their normal diet slowly over a few days.

Plenty of water

- Cats who are suffering from diarrhoea often drink a bit more than usual to replace the extra water they're losing in their poo.
- Make sure your cat has access to plenty of water and that they are drinking throughout the day.
- Some cats may prefer running water – try a cat water fountain.
- Speak to your vet if your cat stops drinking or is drinking much more than usual.

Rest

- It's normal for your cat to want to sleep and recover but if they are extremely tired or not themselves then speak to your vet for advice.

Probiotics

- Probiotics are friendly bacteria for your cat's gut that can be beneficial for some cats but not all. Probiotics are thought to work by topping up the normal bacteria at the same time as absorbing nasty bacteria and toxins.
- Probiotics can be found at your vets or online.

Will my cat need antibiotics?

It is very rare for a cat with diarrhoea to need antibiotics. Only a few specific conditions require them. Antibiotics can even make the problem worse by wiping out "friendly" gut bacteria. Instead, your vet may suggest other treatment options such as probiotics.

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