

THIS JUST IN

## Surgery for Megacolon Partial resection may work

**F**eline megacolon and advanced constipation can be life-threatening. Caught early on, constipation and megacolon may respond favorably to medical treatment and dietary management, but, eventually, some cats stop responding and require surgical removal of a portion of their colon. While the surgery is usually effective, it can leave the cats with liquid stool, and some owners are unable to deal with the constant cleaning. Cats are often euthanized as a result.

A recent study in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* looked at prior surgeries and evaluated outcomes in cats where removing less of the colon (basically, not removing the ileocecolic junction, a sphincter between the small and large colon) resulted in less diarrhea and a better overall outcome. Basically, the cats had less diarrhea. The cats might still have soft feces, but they rarely had the liquid feces that left them dirty and needing frequent cleaning.

This study showed that the surgery that removed less of the colon, leaving the ileocecolic junction, may result in a better surgical outcome. Cats who require surgery for megacolon have a high rate of recurrence of constipation (about 30%), but medical and dietary management may be more successful after surgery. ■

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## Should You Report Hoarding?

*Yes, but you should go through the proper channels*

**W**e have all seen the news accounts: Way too many cats being removed from unsanitary conditions, unhealthy, malnourished, and matted. Reports of overpowering odors, and often, sadly, dead or dying cats and kittens. Clearly, the felines are the victims, but perhaps the person involved is, too.

“I can’t stress how important it is to recognize that animal hoarding, while also a crime, is a mental health issue. Helping the individual who is hoarding is just as important as helping the animals, and may prevent future animal suffering,” explains M. Erin Henry, VMD, DACVPM, assistant clinical professor, Maddie’s Shelter Medicine Program at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

According to the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium, hoarding occurs when an individual possesses more than the typical number of companion animals and is unable to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, shelter, and veterinary care, with this neglect often resulting in starvation, illness, and death. Often, the person denies being unable to provide care and the impact of this failure on the animals, the household, and human occupants of the dwelling.

The reality is that most hoarding cases start out with good intentions. The person involved is willing to help foster or adopt cats that have problems such as infectious diseases, disabilities or injuries, chronic health conditions, or orphaned kittens who need round the clock care. According to the ASPCA, some animal hoarders try to set themselves up as a rescue facility.

At first, all may be well. But then five cats increase to 10, then 15 or 20 or more. Most individuals simply do not have the time, space, or financial capability to provide

proper care for that many cats. The hoarders will defend themselves, saying that if they had not taken the cats in, they would have died or been killed. They feel that only they can provide these cats with what they need.

Recognizing an animal hoarder is not a simple thing. Usually, according to the ASPCA, the home is in disrepair; there may be a strong urine/ammonia smell; the individual is usually in a state of neglect; he or she doesn’t know how many

### Signs of Hoarding:

- ▶ The person appears to own a large number of animals
- ▶ Animals lack adequate nutrition, sanitation, care, and shelter
- ▶ A discussion with the person results in a denial of any problems

### What You Should Do:

- ▶ Contact the department of animal control or an animal welfare group
- ▶ Remember that hoarding is not usually a deliberate effort to cause harm but may be a mental illness



*It's not unusual in hoarding situations for the house to be in need of repair.*

(continues on page 2, bottom)

## Gabapentin for Veterinary Visit Anxiety

*Study shows this common pain medication helps reduce fear*

**M**ost of us are on the lookout for ways to make veterinary visits easier on fearful and fractious cats. A recent study, conducted in France and published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, shows that the pain medication gabapentin may offer some hope.

Owners volunteered 55 healthy cats for the study (29 were considered calm kitties by their owners and 26 were, well, less than happy). The 29 calm cats did not get medicated but provided a control group. The 26 fearful cats took part in a double-blind placebo-controlled trial. That means neither the owners nor the treating veterinarians knew if a cat received gabapentin or a placebo.

Each cat had two veterinary visits, one with gabapentin and one without. The owners had to give the cats a capsule two hours before the veterinary visit. Surprisingly, all owners felt it was easy to give the cats capsules.

The cats were rated on nine behaviors during their veterinary visits. These behaviors started with removal from their crates, covered a full physical examination (including palpation and examination of the eyes, ears, abdomen, and mouth), and having their temperature taken. It ended with return to their carrier. Cats were scored as to any attempts to bite or scratch the veterinary staff.

The results show that gabapentin was very effective in that 20 out of 26 fearful cats showed definite improvement. Equally important, none of the cats got worse after the medication. Some cats did show side effects such as drowsiness and ataxia (uncoordinated movement). All the cats recovered without any treatment in five to 10 hours. Note: Ideally, gabapentin should not be given to cats with kidney disease as they might not metabolize it well.

As stated by the researchers, while this study offers hope that gabapentin may help frightened or otherwise difficult cats cope with a veterinary visit, it does not eliminate the recommendation for using fear-reducing techniques, such as training an individual cat to go in his carrier and to tolerate handling, to help anxious kitties. ■

*Marie Krusska DVM et al. "Clinical evaluation of the effects of a single oral dose of gabapentin on fear based-aggressive behaviors in cats during veterinary examinations," JAVMA Dec 1, 2021, Vol. 259, No. 11.*

*(Hoarding, continued from page 1)*

animals are in the home; the animals are usually parasite-ridden, emaciated, poorly socialized, and often ill. The person will often deny that there is any problem.

What can you do if you suspect there is a hoarding situation? "It truly depends on how well you know the person, but I think the most helpful thing you can do in this situation is to contact the local humane law enforcement group (whether it is associated with the police department, animal control, or an animal welfare group)," says Dr. Henry. "They will be able to investigate further, and hopefully get both the animals and their caretaker the help that they need. If it is a family member, approaching the person may be an option."

Remember that the hoarder does not feel they are doing anything wrong and may not appreciate your intervention. Getting an outside, objective agency involved tends to be the best option for all concerned. Caring for the person is equally as important as caring for the animals they are trying to help. Simply seizing the animals is like treating symptoms but not addressing the cause of a disease.

In Dr. Henry's experience, and in reviewing many hoarding-case reports over the years, without appropriate intervention that focuses on animal hoarding as a psychiatric condition, various studies report a recidivism rate—the tendency to "re-offend"—of 60% to 100%. There have been no studies looking at the "relapse rate," which is the tendency of those who have been "treated" for their condition to resume hoarding.

Anecdotally, however, the greatest level of success occurs in communities with a hoarding task force/alliance, which is when many different organizations (law enforcement, social work/human services, fire dept, animal services, etc.) work together to help the individual and the animals. This is likely because these communities are addressing the underlying problem that leads to hoarding.

If you suspect hoarding, don't hesitate to speak up and follow through to be sure both the cats and people involved all receive the care and attention they need. ■

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# Dental Disease in Senior Cats

*Up to 90% are affected, so start prevention now*

**B**etween 50% and 90% of cats over 4 years of age have dental disease. And, just like you, bad teeth make it difficult for your cat to eat and drink and can leave her feeling lousy. If you haven't done it already, schedule a dental exam for your senior kitty today.

## Symptoms

Signs of a dental problem include drooling, pawing at the mouth, bad breath, and decreased or lack of appetite. Some cats with painful dental conditions approach their food bowl eagerly, but then walk away.

More subtle signals can be weight loss and a failure to groom normally. Of course, many of these signs may be associated with other senior-cat problems such as kidney failure, arthritis, and some cancers, which is just another reason senior-cat veterinary appointments are so important.

## Examination

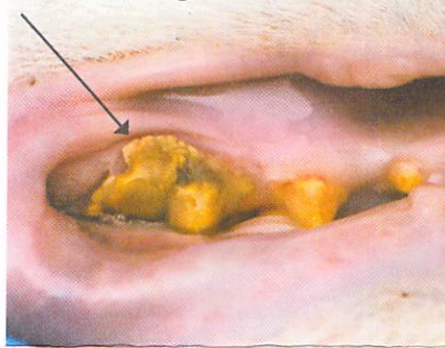
At the veterinary clinic, your veterinarian will examine your cat's mouth for tartar, plaque, gingivitis (inflammation of the gums), and periodontitis (inflammation of the tissues around the teeth themselves, including bones). Left untreated, these problems can lead to potentially life-threatening diseases.

Uncooperative cats and cats that need dental radiographs (x-rays) will require sedation or general anesthesia for a thorough exam. Your veterinarian may choose to do these all at once, with a scheduled dental cleaning and extraction of problem teeth.

In the pre-operative phase, your veterinarian will usually screen for common senior-cat health problems using bloodwork, measurement of blood pressure, and perhaps an echocardiogram if he/she hears a heart murmur during a physical examination. If your cat has chronic health problems, your veterinarian will likely recommend that these problems are brought under control first. Once these conditions are stable, your cat's anesthetic risks usually decrease dramatically.

"Dental cleanings and procedures are done under full anesthesia and are generally considered an elective procedure, meaning there is no medical

*Rock-hard tartar pushes into the gums as it grows, opening the door for bacteria.*



urgency to have them performed in a particular time frame. So, if the patient has underlying systemic disease or cancer, then we may not recommend an elective procedure," says Sydney L. Warshaw, VMD, dentistry and oral surgery resident at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

"As long as the pet is healthy and can be safely placed under general anesthesia, then we do recommend routine professional dental cleanings and comprehensive oral assessments/diagnostics. The frequency of these exams varies per individual and will depend on what disease may be found, its severity, and how the clinician and owner have decided to treat it," says Dr. Warshaw.

Extractions are not uncommon. While having a toothless, or nearly toothless, cat may seem a shock, realize that once your cat's mouth has healed from the extractions, she will usually be able to eat and drink without pain.

## Post Surgery

After a dental procedure, your cat will need some extra care while her mouth heals. She may prefer both her food and water at room temperature. Food should be canned, if possible, and made into a slurry for easy consumption. Kibble

can be softened. Your veterinarian may suggest subcutaneous fluids, which you can learn to administer at home, to keep her normally hydrated by adding water.

Once her mouth is healed, the goal is to keep her teeth in the best condition possible. Luckily, most senior cats accept dental procedures well, all things considered. Some older cats even come to enjoy—OK, maybe tolerate is a better word—dental care at home (see VOHC sidebar). Brushing is the gold standard for dental care, even with missing teeth.

If she is not used to her teeth being brushed, start by simply letting her lick a feline-approved toothpaste from your finger (not human toothpaste, which can be toxic to cats). Eventually, you can move to a toothbrush or finger brush, which many cats prefer. If your cat is toothless or nearly so, you can simply stick to your finger and apply a dental gel.

"We recommend starting slow," says Dr. Warshaw. "Start small and work your way up to brushing. This is a process that can take weeks! First, get the cat used to having their mouth manipulated, such as by raising their lips to show their teeth, then immediately reward them with play or a treat. When that cat is comfortable with having the owner expose their teeth, then use your finger or a very soft bristled toothbrush to gently touch the surface of the teeth, always following with a reward. Once they are comfortable with the toothbrush against their teeth, then you can add on a feline toothpaste, which many times acts as its own reward or treat."

Visit Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine's website at: <https://partnersah.vet.cornell.edu/pet-owners/cat-teeth> to view videos on how to train your cat to accept her teeth being brushed. ■

## VOHC Products

The Veterinary Oral Health Council approves dental products that have been shown to help prevent or treat dental problems. Visit [www.vohc.org](http://www.vohc.org) to find VOHC-accepted products.

## Anesthesia, Dentals, and Senior Cats

Yes, anesthesia risks are higher for older cats, but newer drugs and protocols can minimize anesthesia risk for older cats (your veterinarian cannot do a thorough dental cleaning without anesthesia). Different protocols can be used, for example, in cats with kidney or liver disease, which may be identified in preanesthetic testing.

# Crates Are a Must For Travel

*A crate-trained cat is a happier passenger*

**Y**ou've got that right—we're talking crate training your cat. Crates and carriers aren't just for dogs!

The ways that a crate can be useful for life with your cat include:

- ▶ Containment when doors will be open
- ▶ Easier trips to the veterinarian
- ▶ Determining which cat has diarrhea
- ▶ Prevention of destructive behavior
- ▶ Private spot for litterbox
- ▶ Safe, less stressful travel

## Choosing a Crate or Carrier

The size and type of crate or carrier you need for your cat will depend on how you plan to use it. "For containment at home, a large 24 x 36 inch dog crate that can accommodate a litterbox, food and water bowls, and a perch usually works well", says Kate Basedow, LVT, Cornell College of Arts and Sciences class of 2013.

A plastic or wire crate provides the most security, but lighter fabric crates can be a convenient option as well when you're traveling and can watch her. If your cat tends to be a heavy scratcher, avoid fabric crates. Top doors can make loading your cat up easier.

A crate is especially important for traveling with your cat, so it's important that she be comfortable in the crate before you also introduce her to a new home or hotel. "Cats tend to hunker down and hide when in a new place," says Basedow, who has been a licensed veterinary technician for four years. "You don't want to 'lose' your cat in a strange house or a hotel suite because she is in hiding mode. Setting her up in a crate with everything she needs gives her a sense of security, especially if you put a blanket over it so it feels like a cave, but also ensures that you know where she is."

## The Best Feline Guest

Set up your litterbox to be sure that your cat always has easy access to it to minimize soiling elsewhere at your destination. Have a plan for litter disposal (some heavy-duty bags can help keep down odor), and don't forget to bring a scoop. Finally, do not leave your cat unattended in a hotel room. If you must leave her alone, secure her in a crate.



*The goal is for your cat to be relaxed and comfortable in her crate.*

In the car, however, you might not have as much space. This is where cat carriers shine. Choose a carrier that is big enough for your cat to lie down and turn around comfortably, and a style that appeals to you both. Consider an airline-approved carrier for the most security.

## How to Crate Train Your Cat

"Most cats adjust to a large crate or kennel very readily," says Basedow. "Some might vocalize a bit, but usually it isn't a big deal. If you adopted your cat from a shelter or rescue, she has likely already been in a kennel of some sort and is used to that layout. If you've taken in a stray from outside, she might be more antsy, but the crate will also provide her with a safe den."

Introducing your cat to a carrier can be a little trickier because they are so small (especially the doors).

"Just stuffing your cat in is NOT the way to go," says Basedow. "You might succeed the first time, but the next time your cat sees the carrier she is likely to put up a fight. Make it positive! Leave the carrier open in a convenient spot in your house so that it smells like home, rather than the garage or basement, and your cat can explore it freely. Putting special treats in there for your cat to find is another great way to make her associate the carrier with positive things."

## Traveling With Your Cat

Cats don't like change, so traveling isn't usually high on their list of fun activities. With practice, though, you can make road trips pleasant for your cat. Some

cats do fine in the car, but others drool or vocalize. Take short practice drives around your neighborhood. Using a cat pheromone product like Feliway can also help to calm your cat in the car. If your cat continues to be distressed or nauseous after several practice drives, ask your veterinarian about medications to help your cat relax on the big trip.

Things to bring when traveling with your cat include:

- ▶ Bowls
- ▶ Carrier for in the car
- ▶ Collar or harness with identification
- ▶ Extra blankets or towels
- ▶ Food
- ▶ Larger crate to use at your destination (if needed)
- ▶ Litterbox and the litter that your cat is used to (don't forget a scooper!)
- ▶ Medications (if applicable)
- ▶ Vaccination records
- ▶ Water (some cats dislike water that tastes different)

## Safety When Traveling

Your cat should always be in a carrier when riding in a car. This will keep her secure in case of an accident and prevents her from interfering with the driver or darting out a door or window.

Kitty should wear a collar and/or harness with your phone number on it. Ideally, your cat will never get loose in the first place, but if she does this identification will help her get back to you faster if a good Samaritan takes her in. Microchipping is also a great way to be sure that your cat can be identified in case of an escape.

Keep in mind that cats can behave unpredictably in a new environment. Usually, their first instinct is to hide. In addition to hiding, your cat might try to dart through doors. Be mindful of where your cat is when opening a door, especially if it opens to the outside.

Consider bringing a crate to set up as a "kitty condo" in the hotel room to keep your cat secure and within reach.

## Have Fun

Don't forget to have a little fun with your feline friend! Bring her favorite toys and give her some one-on-one attention each day of the trip just like you would at home. Playing also burns some energy, which will help your cat to rest calmly when she needs to be in her carrier. If your cat is too nervous to play, that's okay. Just cuddle with her and tell her what a great job she's doing. ■

# Cats Living a Quiet Life

## A deaf cat can lead a normal life with precautions

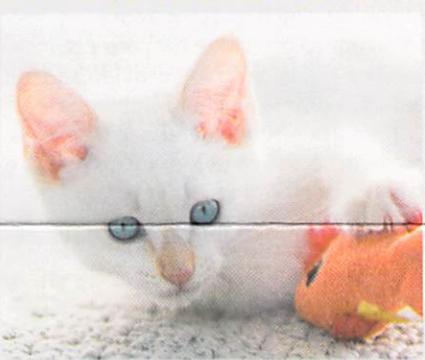
**D**eafness in cats has long been associated with all-white cats, and there is a known genetic link between a white coat with blue eyes and deafness. Cats that are born deaf have what is called “congenital deafness.”

Cats that become deaf later in life have “acquired deafness,” and this can happen to your cat. We will discuss the ways that cats can go deaf, and help you do everything you can to avoid this outcome for your feline friend. It’s important to note, though, that because eardrums do thicken with age, geriatric hearing loss and deafness are common and often unavoidable.

### How Do Cats Hear?

Sound starts as air vibrations that are picked up first by the outermost part of the cat’s ear (pinna), then directed deeper to the ear drum (tympanum). From there, the vibrations move through the middle ear to the inner ear, which is filled with fluid. The air vibrations create waves in this fluid. These waves bend tiny hair cells in the inner ear.

### Blue Eyes, White Coat



While not all white cats with blue eyes are deaf, they are three to five times more likely to be deaf than those without blue eyes. Researchers have found that 17% to 22% of white cats without blue eyes are born deaf. The percentage rises to 40% percent if the cat has one blue eye and 65% to 85% with two blue eyes. Interestingly, if a white cat with one blue eye is deaf in only one ear, that ear will invariably be on the same side of the head as the blue eye.

This bending biochemically results in neurotransmission along a cranial nerve to the brain, where sound is perceived.

The transmission of sound can be interrupted at any one of these steps. When something blocks the sound from reaching the inner ear it’s called conductive deafness. When there is damage or a defect anywhere from the inner ear to the brain it’s called sensorineural deafness. Conductive deafness is usually acquired. Sensorineural can be congenital or acquired. Causes of congenital deafness include difficulties during birth (dystocia) and toxins encountered by the queen during pregnancy.

Causes of acquired sensorineural deafness include:

- ▶ A rare complication of general anesthesia
- ▶ Age-related hearing loss (presbycusis)
- ▶ Chronic excessive noise exposure
- ▶ Head trauma
- ▶ Inner ear infection (otitis interna)
- ▶ Medications or compounds that damage the inner ear (ototoxins)

Causes of acquired conductive deafness include:

- ▶ Ear canal foreign bodies, polyps, tumors
- ▶ External ear infection/inflammation (otitis externa)
- ▶ Middle ear infection/inflammation (otitis media)
- ▶ Wax impactions

### Diagnosis

There are no fancy tests for diagnosing deafness available to most veterinarians in general practice. Typically, owners notice behaviors that make them suspect their cat can’t hear:

- ▶ Difficult to wake
- ▶ Easily startled
- ▶ Less interactive

Kittens with congenital deafness are frequently more vocal than their littermates and tend to play much more aggressively, as they can’t hear their siblings’ loud complaints when things get too rough.

Testing by your veterinarian in the exam room usually involves making loud startling noises and assessing the

response. This test is rudimentary and, as you can imagine, very subjective.

A definitive objective test is available at some specialty centers like the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. It is called Brain Stem Auditory Evoked Response (BAER) test. The BAER test uses electrodes to record inner ear and brain responses to sound. It usually does not require sedation and only takes a few minutes, but it is not often done.

“The procedure is straightforward,” says Ellis Loew, PhD, professor of physiology at Cornell. “Three stainless steel needle electrodes are placed just under the skin. One is placed on the top of the head between the ears, one below and behind the ear canal, and the other in an earflap or on the midline of the back. A small earpiece is placed into the ear canal and a click stimulus delivered. The signal arising from the click is recorded and displayed on the computer screen.

“This is usually of no problem when doing dogs,” says Dr. Loew, “however, for cats, it is necessary to sedate or even anaesthetize. They do not like needles under the skin or an earpiece in the ear. For this reason, I have only on rare occasions done testing on cats.”

The exception is cats with sudden acute hearing loss, he says. “This can arise after dental procedures, where stretching of the mouth has cut off the blood supply to the inner ear; after an acute ear infection after the taking of some drugs; or idiopathic hearing loss (no known reason).”

### What You Can Do

First and foremost, have your cat examined by your veterinarian annually until 10 years of age. After that, every six months is recommended. If your veterinarian does not perform a full otoscopic exam each time, request one. This is the best way to identify most of the causes of acquired conductive deafness outlined above. The earlier problems are identified and rectified, the less likely they are to result in deafness.

If your cat shows any signs that her ears are bothering her, make an appointment with your veterinarian right away. Signs that something is bothering your cat’s ears include head shaking, scratching at the ears, crying or reacting badly if the ears are rubbed or touched, odor or discharge from the ears, head tilt, loss of balance, and loss of appetite.

(continues on page 6)

(Deafness, continued from page 4)

If medications are prescribed for your cat, ask your veterinarian if the medication is potentially ototoxic. Some of the most common ototoxic medications used in veterinary medicine are aminoglycoside antibiotics (gentamicin, amikacin), other antibiotics (tetracycline, ampicillin, chloramphenicol), some chemotherapy drugs, some diuretics, and a handful of other drugs.

A popular antiseptic used in veterinary medicine, chlorhexidine, has been linked to deafness when instilled in the ear canals of cats.

If a potentially ototoxic medication is deemed necessary for your cat, be sure to follow the directions carefully. Using too much of a topical solution can increase ototoxicity, as can treating for longer than the recommended time.

Monitor your cat carefully during treatment. If there is any suspicion that an adverse event is happening, the sooner you discontinue the medication the better the prognosis for return to normalcy.

Some ototoxins will cause deafness as the only identifiable problem. Others may cause balance issues (vestibular signs) including head tilt, loss of balance, and an abnormal jerking movement of the eyes (nystagmus). If you pick up on any of these signs, discontinue the medication right away and see your veterinarian. Unfortunately, deafness from ototoxicity is frequently permanent. Balance issues will typically resolve.

## Conclusion

If your cat becomes deaf for whatever reason, keep him or her indoors! This is paramount for his or her safety.

It is a great kindness to avoid unnecessary startling of deaf cats. One way to do this is by stomping your feet on the floor when approaching, as the vibration will alert them to your presence. Flicking the lights on and off when you get home helps, too, if they are awake at the time.

Nobody wants their cat to go through life unable to hear your voice or hear birds sing. While some of the causes of deafness in cats are not amenable to treatment, many are. Many times, with appropriate treatment, deafness can be avoided. Even in those cases that cannot be cured, though, there are things we can do to make the lives of deaf cats happy, safe, and fulfilling. ■

# Sensitive Stomach Is Not a Blanket Diagnosis

*You need to know why your cat has digestion problems*

**S**o, your cat has a sensitive stomach. What exactly does that mean? Frequent vomiting? Disinterest in food? Diarrhea? All of the above? The most important question is why. Before giving this uncomfortable situation the simple, benign-sounding moniker of “sensitive stomach,” it’s important to rule out any underlying medical conditions that could have serious, long-term ramifications.

First, if you have a cat that vomits, you should know that occasional vomiting is considered normal in the feline species, but the key is “occasional.” Vomiting more than once every few months is more than occasional and may be indicative of a medical problem.

Gary Norsworthy, DVM, a highly respected feline specialist in San Antonio, Texas, published a study in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* on small bowel disease in cats. Of the 100 cats in the 2013 study, 73 cats had chronic vomiting.

After the study, Dr. Norsworthy and his colleagues determined that both veterinarians and cat owners made excuses for chronic vomiting, such as sensitive stomach, hairballs, or eating too quickly, he said in *Veterinary Practice News*. He stated: “I am convinced that the vomiting of hairballs is a sign of chronic small bowel disease if it occurs twice a month or more in any cat; or if it occurs once every two months or more in shorthaired cats; or if it occurs in cats that are not fastidious groomers.” He urged veterinarians to be more proactive in evaluating cats, so they can get a diagnosis and treat cats appropriately.

Second, hairballs may be more than just hairballs. Current thinking on hairballs is that an underlying disorder, like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), may be interfering with normal gastric motility and that may be why the hair accumulates in the stomach.

## Diagnostics

The gold standard of care for cats with a sensitive stomach starts with a comprehensive medical work-up including bloodwork [complete blood



*Pursuing the cause of your cat's “sensitive stomach” is important to his overall health and comfort.*

count (CBC), chemistry screen, thyroid hormone, fecal exam for parasites, and abdomen x-rays and ultrasound.

A stepwise approach to the diagnostic process is sometimes elected due to the expense associated with a comprehensive approach. Your veterinarian will determine which tests are most important to prioritize for your cat, based on the history you provide and your cat’s physical exam findings.

If no underlying metabolic disorders are identified, such as kidney disease, diabetes, or thyroid problems, your cat may have a food allergy or feline gastric retention (delayed gastric emptying).

Food allergy commonly causes GI distress for cats. A diet trial is the best way to rule out a food allergy. While proteins are considered the most likely culprit in food, there are so many shared ingredients in commercial cat foods that simply trying a different brand with a different protein source is likely to lead to frustration and disappointment. And a lot of wasted food.

As such, diet trials are best conducted using either a limited ingredient diet (LID) or a hydrolyzed protein diet (HP). A strict diet trial must be conducted for 14 days before deciding whether a positive response is achieved or not.

Hill’s and Royal Canin make a slew of prescription LIDs to choose from, and

there are over-the-counter brands of LIDs available now, too. The important thing is to look at the ingredient list, making sure there is only one protein source and one carbohydrate source. The rest should be primarily vitamins and minerals. A novel (meaning that it's new to your cat) protein source is best, like duck or rabbit.

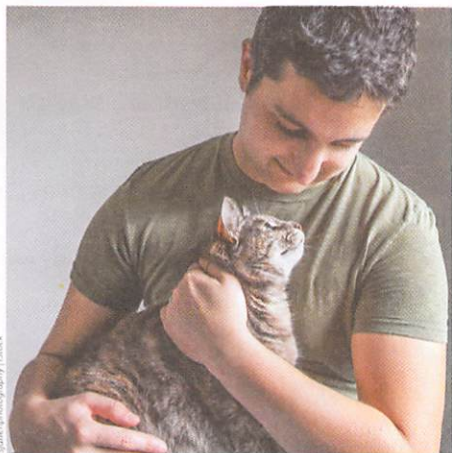
Proteins are very large particles made up of amino acids. With food allergy, it is thought that the immune system sees these large particles as foreign invaders and tries to fight them. With HP diets, the protein source is broken down into smaller amino acid sequences, which are (hopefully) not recognized by the body as foreign. No foreign offender, no allergic response.

HP diets are available with a prescription, so you will need veterinary involvement. There are several products to choose from including Hill's z/d, Royal Canin HP, Royal Canin Ultamino, and Purina HA.

Feline gastric retention is a gastric motility disorder that is defined by delayed emptying of stomach contents. Normal stomach emptying after a meal in cats is generally takes about four to six hours, with an occasional normal outlier at 10 to 12 hours. Cats that vomit partially digested food eight to 12 hours after a meal may well be suffering from feline gastric retention.

Inflammatory bowel disease and GI lymphoma commonly cause vomiting in cats, and the only definitive way to diagnose these conditions is by obtaining a biopsy of the intestinal tract, either via endoscopy or abdominal surgery, both of which require general anesthesia.

Endocrine diseases like hyperthyroidism and diabetes also can



*You know your cat better than anyone else, and he needs you to be his advocate.*

cause vomiting in cats, and these can be specifically treated if they are identified.

### Try These at Home

First, small meals more frequently throughout the day will work better for these cats than a couple of large meals. Cat digestive organs are designed more for eating this way (think of cats hunting small prey in the wild).

For cats that seemingly eat too fast, spreading their food out on a dinner plate or on a cookie sheet will effectively slow them down.

If your cat does better with canned food than dry, feed canned. And vice versa. Although canned food is generally considered easier to digest.

Fats are harder to digest and may contribute to delayed gastric emptying. Choosing a prescription low-fat, highly digestible food like Hill's I/d, Royal Canin GI, or Purina EN may help.

### Medications

Talk to your veterinarian about whether medications might help. Drugs that promote gastric motility (prokinetics) relax the outlet to the stomach and encourage stronger contractions to move food along.

Metoclopramide and cisapride are examples of prokinetic drugs. The downside with these is they generally must be given three times daily, 30 minutes before a meal, which can be challenging, especially long-term.

Sometimes reducing stomach acid can settle a sensitive stomach. Famotidine (Pepcid-AC) is a popular H<sub>2</sub> blocker that decreases the amount of stomach acid produced. It is commonly used on an extra-label basis in cats. It can be dosed once a day, which is nice. The downside is that cats seem to develop a tolerance to this medication over time, making it less appealing for long-term use.

Omeprazole (Prilosec) is a proton-pump inhibitor that also decreases the amount of stomach acid produced. It is also often used on an extra-label basis in cats, dosed twice a day, and is often a better choice for long-term use.

Your veterinarian may suggest trying a course of sucralfate, a medication that binds to irritated or ulcerated areas of the stomach lining, protecting it from further erosion by stomach acid, and allowing it to heal. The only way to know for sure whether ulcers are present is with endoscopy and/or biopsy, which are pretty aggressive, invasive procedures.

## Report These Symptoms

There is a long list of underlying conditions that can cause the classic symptoms of a sensitive stomach and that should be discussed with your veterinarian.

Symptoms include:

- ▶ Abdominal discomfort
- ▶ Bloating
- ▶ Decreased appetite
- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Disinterest in food
- ▶ Gurgling intestinal sounds
- ▶ Nausea (licking lips, walking up to food as if interested then walking away)
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Weight loss

Underlying conditions include but are not limited to:

- ▶ Cancer (commonly lymphoma)
- ▶ Diabetes
- ▶ Feline gastric retention
- ▶ Food allergy
- ▶ Gastric ulcers
- ▶ IBD
- ▶ Ingested foreign material
- ▶ Liver, kidney, thyroid disease
- ▶ Pancreatitis
- ▶ Parasites
- ▶ Stress

Sometimes, response to therapy with sucralfate is a better way to back into a presumptive diagnosis of stomach ulcers.

Because there is an abundance of serotonin receptors in the GI tract, fluoxetine (Prozac), a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) mostly used for anxiety and stress-related behavior, is thought to have a calming effect on the GI tracts of cats. Since stress in general can be a nemesis in cats, fluoxetine may well be worth a try.

### In Conclusion

Here's the bottom line on cats with sensitive stomachs. There are many possible underlying disorders that must first be ruled out before the gentle label of "sensitive stomach" can be applied to your cat.

If underlying diseases have been ruled out, don't lose hope. There are things you can try, as described above, to help settle that sensitive stomach. ■

# Bladder Stones: Remove or Not?

*The answer depends on a number of factors*

**Q** My 10-year-old female cat was recently diagnosed with several small calcium oxalate stones in her bladder, but she is otherwise acting normal. My veterinarian noted that the recommended diet change has not dissolved/lessened these stones. How important is it to surgically remove five stones from the bladder of this asymptomatic kitty? I don't want to stress her unnecessarily since she has already had diabetes-related skin issues and had an eye surgically removed when she was at the shelter where I adopted her.

**A** Thanks for getting in touch, and I completely understand your concern for this kitty. Uroliths, or urinary tract stones, are a common feline condition that can potentially cause significant problems depending upon their location, composition, and other factors, including the presence of other diseases like chronic renal disease, diabetes, and/or urinary tract infections.

It is not surprising that these stones were not dissolved by dietary modification, as unlike the case with some forms of uroliths (like struvite and urate uroliths), which can often be dissolved medically and/or by changes in diet, this is not usually the case with calcium oxalate crystals.

For the sake of this discussion, I will assume that your cat only has stones in her urinary bladder, that there is no urinary tract infection, and that she has no other health issue aside from diabetes.

The decision regarding whether to surgically remove uroliths is multifactorial. There is some disagreement among veterinarians regarding best practices in this situation, but there is a good amount of evidence suggesting that conservative management involving leaving the stones in the bladder with careful monitoring and steps to minimize the likelihood of

further stone formation and infection may be reasonable in many cases.

The fact that your cat has diabetes may predispose her to urinary tract infections (glucose in the urine of diabetics may create a more favorable environment for bacterial growth in the urinary tract), and there is some concern that the presence of stones may exacerbate this possibility, but this is a source of debate.

The major concern is that these stones may end up obstructing your cat's urethra, making it difficult or even impossible for her to urinate, which is a potentially life-threatening medical emergency that must be dealt with immediately. While this is possible, and

becomes more likely if more stones form or if they migrate, there is evidence to suggest that urethral obstruction may be more likely to occur after surgery to remove bladder stones in some cats.

If these stones do not change in size (and you must work with your veterinarian to make sure that the size of the bladder stones is monitored judiciously), and if he/she educates you about the signs of potential urethral obstruction/urinary tract infection (painful urination, inability to urinate, blood in the urine, urinating outside the litter box, frequent urination with small amounts of urine, frequent licking of the genital region, lethargy), it may be reasonable to adopt a conservative approach without surgically removing these uroliths.

Please continue to work closely with your veterinarian to assure best care, and best of luck with this kitty. ■

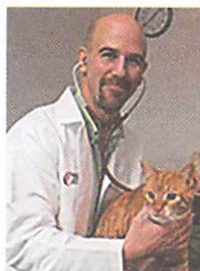
## 5 THINGS

### Smart Ways to Promote Weight Loss

*For your cat's health and well-being*

**E**xcess weight is unhealthy and uncomfortable. It also makes your cat more susceptible to bladder/urinary tract disease, kidney disease, breathing difficulties, arthritis, heart failure, and orthopedic pain. It's not hard to get kitty back on track. Try these simple tips:

- 1** Get a current weight and compare it to what your cat weighed the last time he had a veterinary appointment, so you know what you're up against.
- 2** Make weight loss gradual. Cats can safely lose 0.5 to 2 percent of their body weight weekly, which is about 3.2 ounces per week for a 10-pound cat. Losing more can cause a deadly health problem called hepatic lipidosis.
- 3** Skip free feeding. Instead of allowing your cat to eat at will, put out small meals for her throughout the day, so you can control her total intake.
- 4** Choose a weight-reduction commercial diet rather than just feeding less of his current food. This will help ensure he gets adequate nutrition.
- 5** Play with your cat. Exercise will help and few cats can resist a feather toy or a ball to chase or bat around for at least a few minutes every day. ■



#### Do You Have a Health Concern?

Send your health questions to Bruce Kornreich, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, Director of the Cornell Feline Health Center and Editor-in-Chief of CatWatch. Email to [catwatcheditor@cornell.edu](mailto:catwatcheditor@cornell.edu) or send by regular mail to CatWatch, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713.



Scan this code for more information on the Cornell Feline Health Center.

#### Coming Up ...

- ▶ Medications for Feline Anxiety Problems
- ▶ Links Between Coat Color and Personality
- ▶ Understanding Kidney-Disease Diets
- ▶ Cats With Abnormal Sensitivity Levels