



Constipation

Constipation can be a minor discomfort or severe enough to be potentially life threatening. Regardless, your pet will be uncomfortable and not feel well.

CAUTION: If your pet is a male cat and he's in the litter box straining, take him to a vet **immediately**. Instead of being



constipated, he may not be able to urinate. This is extremely serious and can be life threatening.

Causes

Constipation can be the result of eating the wrong thing. Eating bones can cause constipation or an impaction. Impaction means that there is a solid block of stool that is stuck. Constipation that goes on long enough can also lead to this.

A change in diet or drinking less water can also cause constipation. Some drugs can make your pet more likely to have problems. If your pet has recently started a new medicine, ask whether constipation can be a side effect.

Occasionally some other medical problems will cause constipation. Many times, we don't really know why it has happened.

Cats can develop a condition called megacolon (dogs can too but it is not common). The muscles of the colon are not contracting the way they should and moving the feces out. This leads to chronic constipation.

Signs

The most obvious sign is that your pet is straining while trying to defecate. Often we notice this more readily in dogs than in cats. You may notice your cat sitting in the litter box for an extended time. Your pet may also pass small amounts of hard, dried stool.

If a pet has diarrhea, it can also cause him to strain due to irritation in the colon. You may think he's constipated, though, in reality, it's the opposite problem. If constipation persists, your pet may start vomiting. Your pet may also stop eating or eat less.

Treatment

Help your pet by adding water to his food and increasing fiber. This will often take care of mild problems.



Start with a small amount of fiber added to your pet's food and increase it until the stools are soft enough for your pet to pass easily. Fiber works by drawing more water into the stool and making it softer and easier to pass.

You can use psyllium (Metamucil®) or canned pumpkin (½ to 4 teaspoons per meal). For cats or small dogs, start with just ¼ tsp. You can also use a prescription high-fiber diet from your vet. Be sure your pet has plenty of water and is drinking.

If your pet has repeated problems with constipation, adding fiber daily or a high-fiber diet may help. Feeding wet food may also help because it has more water in it than dry food.

When simple measures at home don't work or if your pet is acting sick, it's time for your pet to see the vet. Enemas will usually help to resolve the problem. If an impaction is present, your pet may need to be sedated to have the feces manually removed or may even need to have surgery. Veterinarians will often prescribe laxatives or stool softeners to help the problem.

If your pet develops recurring or chronic constipation, we will run tests to try to determine an underlying cause.

Megacolon

Cats with megacolon initially respond to high fiber diets, stool softeners, or laxatives. Probiotics, the "good" bacteria in the intestines may help. Laser therapy can also help to improve the nerves and muscle tone.

Over time, these efforts may not work as well, and many cats need to have enemas. Then the need for enemas becomes more frequent. Eventually, for some cats, nothing works and surgery to remove part of the colon is required. Although this seems like a drastic step, most cats respond well to it.

Summary

Constipation is usually more uncomfortable than serious. However, your pet may feel miserable. Make sure your pet has plenty of water at all times and eats a normal diet. Prevent your pet from eating things it shouldn't.

