



Diarrhea



Diarrhea can range from a slightly softer than normal stool to very watery stools that can be explosive.

Fortunately, most cases aren't serious but your pet can make a mess in the house before you get it under control. In some cases, the problem keeps coming back or you can't quite clear it up.

Causes

There are many possible reasons why your pet develops diarrhea. Discovering the cause can sometimes be a challenge. Often we may treat the signs to see if the problem improves and will do extensive testing later. Some possible causes are:

- Parasites
- Spoiled or unfamiliar food
- Toxins
- Diseases of an organ
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)
- Intestinal problems
- Infections
- Cancer
- Foreign body
- Food allergy
- Stress

Mild Cases

Mild signs would include soft stool along with a pet that is feeling normal and still has an appetite. Call us for advice on whether you can treat your pet at home or if it's best to come in for an exam.

In some cases, as your pet improves, there may be no bowel movement for a day or so. This is because he was "emptied out" by the diarrhea. This is not a cause for concern as long as he is not trying to defecate. If diarrhea comes back, however, your pet will need an exam.

When to See the Vet

There are times when your pet needs to see the vet. The biggest concern, especially with cats and small dogs, is dehydration.



This leads to all kinds of complications and your pet will be miserable. Getting some fluids can make a huge difference.

A pet having very runny, watery stools, especially if it is explosive, may have a more serious problem. In addition, dark, tarry stools, blood, mucous, increased urgency or straining to defecate, lethargy, loss of appetite, weight loss or vomiting are all signs that indicate a need for an exam. We will need to run some tests to determine what the cause is.

Testing will usually start with fecal tests and for pets with more serious or recurring signs, a blood count, chemistries to check organs, and x-rays. We might suggest additional testing based on the results of the initial ones.

There can be more than one thing going on at the same time. In this case, treatment for one thing might provide some improvement but not enough. For instance, a pet with food allergies that also has parasites. Eliminating the parasites will help but not enough until the food allergies are under control.

Medical treatment

We frequently give medicine for parasites even if tests don't show them. The reason is that some parasites are difficult to find, and you want to make sure that's not the cause before doing many tests.

Diarrhea can cause a disruption in the normal bacteria and allow more of the "bad guys" to grow. Some abnormal bacteria can also cause diarrhea. In these cases, antibiotics can help as well as probiotics.

Probiotics are the "good" bacteria in the intestines. They help by improving the health of the GI tract and by helping the immune system.



Probiotics are important whenever your pet is taking antibiotics.

Medication to slow down the diarrhea will help control the signs and help your pet be more comfortable. A special diet can sometimes help. Either a bland diet that is easily digestible, a high fiber diet, or a diet designed to control food allergies are all possible choices that may help your pet.

Chronic problems

If diarrhea becomes chronic, everyone becomes frustrated. Typically, that means we've tried all the simple, easy things and now need to do more tests or more trials of medications. The cause can usually be determined but it takes time and patience. However, it's important to keep looking for the underlying cause so you can treat it properly and stop the problem.