

Ask the Vet



Cecilia Ho, DVM

Dr. Ho is a graduate of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Michigan State University. She decided to specialize in feline medicine two years into private practice as she found feline medicine to be more challenging and rewarding. Dr. Ho opened Cat Care Hospital in 2003 in the Sedgefield area and welcomes new patients.

Diarrhea in Cats, Needs Early Treatment

I just adopted a new kitten. He was doing fine but now he has diarrhea. What could be wrong?

There are several reasons for kittens to develop diarrhea. One of the most common is intestinal parasites. It is important to have a stool sample checked by a veterinarian so that the type of intestinal parasites present can be diagnosed. Based on the results, the kitten can be given appropriate deworming medication. It is important to have the deworming medication dispensed by your veterinarian as certain over-the-counter dewormers are ineffective and may end up harming your cat. Even if the stool sample check is negative for the eggs of intestinal parasites, it is highly recommended that kittens receive deworming medication for at least two or more doses. Stool sample checks can be negative if the intestinal parasites aren't shedding their eggs.

Another reason that kittens will develop diarrhea, is if they are being overfed. Because kittens grow rapidly, they tend to have very healthy appetites and will eat voraciously if allowed to do so. This large intake of food places a lot of stress on the intestinal tract, which then tries to compensate by contracting more frequently to move food through the intestines more quickly. This can then lead to diarrhea. This problem can be easily solved by decreasing the amount of food being fed and feeding appropriate amounts for the kitten's age. Your veterinarian can help you decide what is best for your kitten.

In some cases diarrhea can also be caused by an overgrowth of the abnormal bacteria in the intestinal tract. Again, based on a stool sample exam by your veterinarian, this problem can be resolved by prescribing some oral antibiotics and/or a probiotic supplement. Probiotics help return the intestinal bacterial population to its normal state.

My cat is five years old and has been indoors all his life. He now has diarrhea. What could cause this?

If your cat has been indoors all his life, the likelihood of intestinal parasites as the reason for the diarrhea is low. However, a stool sample should always be checked just to be safe. Depending on whether there are any other clinical signs besides the diarrhea, one of the most common

reasons for the diarrhea would be a dietary change. Any dietary changes should be done gradually to give the cat a chance to adjust to the new diet. If the diarrhea persists, the cat should be placed back on its old diet. Certain diets, while high-quality diets, may have fat contents that are too high or other ingredients which do not agree with your cat, resulting in diarrhea.

Another reason for the diarrhea is stress. It is common for certain cats to develop diarrhea after stressful events in their lives. Cats can develop diarrhea after being boarded, after a move or even if a certain family member has moved away. Again, it is important to have your cat examined by a veterinarian so that all medical reasons for the diarrhea can be ruled out and appropriate treatments started.

My 14 year-old cat has had diarrhea for the past two months. What can I do?

The causes of diarrhea in older cats are varied and numerous. Among the more common reasons are an elevated thyroid hormone level and/or inflammatory bowel disease. As it is impossible to distinguish between the causes for the diarrhea, it is necessary to have your cat examined by a veterinarian. Your veterinarian will run several tests to help identify and isolate the cause for your cat's diarrhea. Once a diagnosis is made, the appropriate treatment can be started.

Several points need to be stressed. Diarrhea in cats is not normal and the longer the diarrhea persists, the more difficult it is to treat. It is also highly dangerous to administer *Pepto-Bismol*[®] to cats to treat the diarrhea. *Pepto-Bismol*[®] contains salicylic acid, an ingredient in aspirin, and is **toxic** to cats. As with all things related to your cat's health, please contact your veterinarian immediately if you notice anything abnormal so that your cat can be diagnosed and treated as soon as possible.

See ad for Cat Care Hospital on page 27.