



## Janine M. Oliver, DVM

Dr. Oliver earned her B.S. in Physical Therapy (1987) from East Carolina University and her D.V.M. from North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine (2008). She was a human physical therapist for 12 years before returning to school to study veterinary medicine. She had additional training in veterinary nutrition, dentistry, exotics and emergency critical care. She is a general practitioner veterinarian with special interests in geriatric feline and canine internal medicine, nutrition, physical rehabilitation, soft tissue surgery, dentistry, and exotics. She moved to Greensboro in 2009 and loves what she does every day.



## The Shocking Truth...Normal, Healthy Cats Do Not Vomit!



I'm not sure exactly when in my life, before or during veterinary training, I was led to believe that it is normal for cats to routinely vomit maybe once or twice a week. Sadly I was one of those vets who just chalked up "occasional cat vomiting" as normal. My own cats, Ellen and Barney, would vomit hair balls about once a week. It was gross, especially when stepped on in a sleepy trip to the bathroom, but I thought it was normal and that my cats were healthy. They are short haired cats but still would shed a lot. In addition to hair balls, my wife was terribly allergic to our cats and so they had to stay in only certain parts of our house to enable her to breathe normally. I fed them a high quality premium dry cat food with canned food as a treat every so often for most of their 12 and 11 year old lives. Then I changed their food.

About six months ago I decided to put a few of my canine patients, who just weren't improving on their prescription diets like I thought they should, on a fresh whole food diet. I created a complete and balanced fresh whole food version of their prescription diets and the five cases I tried it with, all improved. I decided to feed all of my personal pets this way, my dogs and my cats. I changed the recipe to meet feline requirements and after two weeks I was shocked to notice that there were no longer any cat fur tumble weeds in our house between vacuuming. In addition to this, my wife was starting to interact with Ellen and Barney more and she wasn't immediately starting to wheeze or snifle...and added bonus, I have not had to clean up a vomited hair ball in 6 months.

I attended the American Association of Feline Practitioners annual conference in Indianapolis at the end of September. The first lecture was given by Dr. Gary Northworthy, a veterinarian specifically ABVP board certified in feline medicine. There were hundreds of veterinarians in attendance. He asked us how many of us had cats and every single person in the room raised their hands. Then he asked us how many of our personal cats vomited once a week and the vast majority of us feline practicing veterinarians kept our hands raised. He chuckled and then began to school us on why we were wrong and how we could help our poor vomiting cats. There were many good speakers over those three days, but his talk stood out to me as the most important one. It made me realize the reason Ellen and Barney weren't vomiting anymore was their change of diet.

Dr. Northworthy's talk combined with Ellen and Barney's improvement made me immediately revise my feline recommendations when I returned to work. Dr. Northworthy presented evidence based medical facts and recommendations on how to manage this vast and increasing number of vomiting cats in our midst. I immediately received some of the same feedback from clients that he had predicted in his talk. Because chronic vomiting is very common in cats we have all made excuses for it.

Here are a few of the excuses that we as veterinarians hear every day and many of us incorrectly believed to be true:

- *My cat eats too fast.*
- *My cat has a nervous stomach.*
- *It is just hairballs and they are normal.*
- *"He's just a puker," i.e., it is normal for this cat.*

The majority of chronic vomiting and chronic diarrhea in cats is from inflammation in the small bowel, not in the stomach or large bowel with very few occasional exceptions. Small bowel disease is segmental in 75%+ of cats. That means it can be hard to find if you try to look for it with an endoscope or only take a single site sample during biopsy.

**Diagnostics Your Veterinarian May NEED to do to diagnose your chronically vomiting cat:**

Blood work, radiographs, abdominal ultrasound, eight to twelve week food trial and surgical biopsies of the small intestine, liver and pancreas.

The BAD NEWS? Vomiting in cats is not normal and in 19% of vomiting cats there will be a sad diagnosis and limited treatments available. The GOOD NEWS? We can effectively treat 81% of vomiting cats with diet plus or minus one or more medications! That is fantastic news! That means that 81% of vomiting cats do not have to vomit any more. They don't have to hide their GI pain and feel grumpy and miserable. They don't have to waste away and their quality of life can dramatically improve! You don't have to step in and/or clean up vomited hair balls!

How do we manage these vomiting cats? That will depend on the cause of their vomiting. Discuss any vomiting that happens more than twice a month with your veterinarian. Based on a thorough physical exam they will make diagnostic, diet and treatment recommendations. Most cat diets should consist of a complete and balanced moist canned or homemade diet high in quality protein, moderate in good fats and low in carbohydrates. They should never contain food coloring or chemical preservatives. Some cats don't even tolerate "natural preservatives" like rosemary or mixed tocopherols, "aka" vitamin E. Unfortunately not all cats immediately like wet food, and most cats don't enjoy rapid change. There are feline carbohydrate addicts out there who can be difficult to switch to any canned food, let alone a healthy one. Talk to your veterinarian about tips to transition cats from dry to canned and what foods they recommend.

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