

Help for Hairballs

A feline behaviorist explains how hairball remedies help cats deal with hairballs.

Pam Johnson-Bennett

Q: How does hairball medicine work? Is a food formulated to help prevent hairballs better? If it is petroleum based, does the hairball medicine work its way through the hairball and break or dissolve it? Or does it just help it pass? Does olive oil work? Why do people suggest butter? Feline behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat*, says: Hairball formula food contains higher amounts of fiber that help push the intestinal contents through the system smoothly. This food also contains specific enzymes that help prevent hairballs from forming in the stomach in the first place. Hairball gel or paste contains mineral oil or petroleum jelly because that is not absorbed in the system and therefore helps lubricate so the hairball will pass easily. It should not be given with food therefore, so it won't interfere with normal nutrition. Butter is not a good idea because that is absorbed and will add to the cat's fat and caloric intake. Vegetable oils are also not a good idea. Polyunsaturated fats gets absorbed although they are not used by the cat and so it again adds to the caloric intake.
Best, Pam Johnson-Bennett, CABC IAABC-Certified Animal Behavior Consultant

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