

Why Does My Cat Vomit Excessively?

Find out what the causes could be behind chronic vomiting.

Q: We have a male domestic short-haired cat. He is 2 years old and very active. Our problem is that he vomits very often. He vomits about five to 10 minutes after eating and occasionally in the middle of the day. We also notice that he eats fuzz, such as cat fur, carpet fuzz, dust bunnies, thread, etc.

We took him to the vet a few months ago because he was vomiting two to three times a day and completely had stopped eating and drinking. The veterinarian said that the cat had developed jaundice from not eating. He was hospitalized and put on IV fluids for two nights and was sent home on the antibiotic amoxicillin and another medication that I think was another antibiotic.

He did well after coming home, but now the vomiting has recurred. We tried switching his food brand but he just sniffs it and walks away. So we reverted back to what we were feeding him before, but now he won't eat that either.

We think the not-eating has to do with the flea medication we give him because we have noticed that these symptoms tend to occur together. How can we encourage him to eat so he will keep his food down and not develop a liver disorder?

A: When cats vomit, it is either a systemic illness, or it is a gastrointestinal disorder. To achieve a diagnosis, several tests need to be performed to rule out a systemic illness, such as kidney failure, liver disease, etc. Your cat showed evidence of liver disease — the jaundice — but it is difficult to say what the cause is. Your cat's failure to eat for a few days (some cats can develop hepatic lipidosis — a liver disorder — if they do not eat for several days) as your veterinarian suggested, could be the culprit.

Another problem that can cause chronic vomiting and jaundice is pancreatitis or "triaditis," the term veterinarians use to describe a syndrome that is a combination of cholangiohepatitis, which is liver inflammation, pancreatitis and inflammatory bowel disease. I think your cat needs to have further diagnostics performed. An abdominal ultrasound would be a good starting place. This would allow assessment of the liver to look for changes consistent with liver disease, the pancreas to see if pancreatitis is a possibility and the intestinal tract to see if the intestines look thickened or irregular. Your vet also should consider running a test called a PLI, which is a simple blood test that is now considered the best test for diagnosing pancreatitis in cats. If the intestines look abnormal on the ultrasound, your cat might need to have a procedure performed called an endoscopy, so that the intestines can be assessed in more detail, and biopsy specimens can be obtained. Inflammatory bowel disease is a common cause of persistent vomiting in cats, and an endoscopy is an excellent and fairly non-invasive way to obtain a diagnosis.

If you choose not to pursue further diagnostics, then consider feeding a hypoallergenic diet, which is a diet that contains a novel protein source, such as rabbit, venison or duck, in case a food allergy is the cause of your cat's chronic vomiting.

Regards,
Arnold Plotnick, DVM