

## How to Avoid Five of the Most Common Disorders for Cats

It's astonishing how many commonly diagnosed disorders and diseases are treatable and even preventable, just by changing your kitty's food and lifestyle. Find out how you can help stave off your next urgent veterinary visit.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Feline family members today often deal with health conditions that can be linked directly to their diet and lifestyle
- Common, often preventable conditions in cats include diabetes, hyperthyroidism, lower urinary tract disease, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and constipation
- There are many things pet parents can do to help your cat avoid these common disorders, starting with what you feed him and the type of environment you provide for him

It's astonishing how many commonly diagnosed disorders and diseases in cats are treatable — and in many cases, preventable — through the diet they're fed and the lifestyle they're provided.

Following are five of the most common conditions that send cats to the veterinarian's office, along with suggestions on how you can help prevent your own feline family member from having to deal with one of these debilitating diseases.

### #1 Diabetes

**Feline diabetes** rates have skyrocketed over the last 15 years. The disease is most often seen in overweight and obese adult cats who are fed biologically inappropriate dry food diets and get little to no exercise. This is the form of diabetes that you aren't born with, but that is acquired by eating the wrong food and often, too much of it.

Feline diabetes is almost 100% preventable, so for the sake of your beloved kitty, I hope you'll give some serious thought to the importance of nutrition, exercise, and maintaining your pet at a healthy weight.

#### Tips for preventing diabetes in your cat:

- Avoid dry food. All dry foods require starch (carbs) for manufacturing. Avoid canned cat foods containing grains (e.g., corn, wheat, rice, soy, millet, quinoa). Also avoid starchy grain-free, high calorie, high glycemic diets containing potatoes, chickpeas, peas, or tapioca. All the carbs (starch) in your cat's food, which can be as much as 80% of the contents, break down into sugar. Excess sugar can result in diabetes.

Help your cat stay trim by feeding a portion controlled, fresh, moisture-rich, nutritionally balanced, species-

specific diet consisting of a variety of unadulterated protein sources and healthy fats, and specific nutritional supplements as necessary.

- Curb greedy eating behavior. If your cat gobbles his meals, find a way to slow his roll. One way is to use an inexpensive mini-muffin tin. Simply put a bit of food in each individual muffin cup and kitty will no longer be able to eat his entire meal in one or two swallows, since he must move from cup to cup, which will naturally slow him down.

If you don't own a mini muffin tin, you can also try spreading the food out over a large cookie or baking sheet. If you prefer something a bit more high-tech, there are slow-feed bowls you can purchase that provide essentially the same benefit.

- See to it that your kitty gets a minimum of 20 minutes of daily aerobic exercise. Indoor hunting feeder mice can help.
- Whenever possible, give your cat safe access to the outdoors in nice weather. Options are to teach kitty to take walks with you on a harness and leash, or you can build or buy a safe outdoor enclosure like a **catio**.
- Don't allow your cat to be over-vaccinated. There's a growing body of research that connects autoimmune disorders to diabetes in dogs, and the same may be true for cats. If your kitty has had vaccines in the past, there's a high likelihood her immunity will last a lifetime.

I recommend you find a veterinarian who runs titer tests to measure antibody response from previous vaccinations. Titer results will tell you whether vaccination is necessary, and for which specific diseases.

- Also don't allow your cat to receive **unnecessary steroid therapy**, as recent research has identified that corticosteroid therapy may increase the risk for feline diabetes.<sup>1</sup>

## #2 Hyperthyroidism

Feline hyperthyroidism is the most common endocrine disorder of domestic cats, with over 10% of kitties over the age of 10 diagnosed with the disease. It's usually caused by a benign tumor on the thyroid gland called an adenoma. In rare cases, the tumor is a carcinoma, which is cancer.

### Tips for helping your cat avoid hyperthyroidism:

- Feed a nutritionally balanced, fresh, species-appropriate diet that is respectful of a cat's natural iodine intake (which is very low).
- Do not buy canned food that is not labeled BPA-free.
- Avoid feeding your cat a **fish-based diet**, or any food containing soy products.
- Rid your environment of flame retardant chemicals.
- Provide your cat with an organic pet bed.
- Purchase a high-quality air purifier for your cat's environment.

## #3 Lower Urinary Tract Disease

Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) describes a group of conditions affecting the bladder or urethra. A few of the most common include cystitis (inflammation of the bladder), bacterial infection, and urethral blockage.

If you think your cat might have a problem involving the lower urinary tract, it's important to make an appointment with your veterinarian. It's also extremely important to focus on reducing or eliminating potential stressors in your cat's life. Stress typically has three sources: environmental, immunologic, and nutritional.

### **Tips for preventing lower urinary tract disease in your cat:**

- Eliminate nutritional stress by avoiding poor quality, grain-based, starchy, rendered diets that contain additives, potentially toxic preservatives, and unnecessary fats, salts and sugar. Transition your cat to a species-appropriate, nutritionally balanced, fresh food diet or a human-grade canned food.
- As much as possible, minimize environmental stress, which can be anything from a move to a new home, the birth of a baby, a divorce, or the addition of a new pet. All these things can create emotional stress in your cat.

Talk with your integrative veterinarian about calming pheromone products, homeopathic remedies, and flower essences designed to balance emotional disturbances in kitties.

- Minimize immunologic stressors by not over-vaccinating your cat. If you have an indoor-only kitty and aren't inclined to bring home strays, the risk of exposure to infectious diseases is almost non-existent, and unnecessary vaccines can put a tremendous amount of immunologic stress on your cat.

## **#4 Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)**

Irritable bowel syndrome, also often called "**sensitive stomach**," is actually less common in cats than IBD and other gastrointestinal (GI) diseases, but it may not seem so, because when a kitty's digestive issues aren't accurately or thoroughly diagnosed, they're often lumped into the category of IBS.

The most common symptoms of IBS in cats involve intermittent-but-consistent bouts of diarrhea, frequent trips to the litterbox to pass small amounts of poop and mucus, and constipation. Some cats also suffer from abdominal pain, bloating, nausea and vomiting.

### **Tips for helping your cat avoid IBS flare-ups:**

- Work with an integrative veterinarian to create a comprehensive protocol to address dietary issues and appropriate supplements, including a **high-quality pet probiotic**.

Depending on your kitty's symptoms, your veterinarian may recommend a bland diet for a few days, until symptoms improve. The **bland diet I prefer** is a grain-free menu of cooked ground turkey and canned pumpkin (pure pumpkin, not the filling used in pies) or cooked sweet potato.

When it's safe for your cat to transition away from the bland diet, I recommend working with your vet to create a novel protein diet. This will give kitty's GI tract and immune system a good rest.

- Irritable bowel syndrome can cause either diarrhea or constipation, and fiber supplementation can address both symptoms. Good options include psyllium husk powder, ground dark green leafy vegetables, coconut oil, canned 100% pumpkin, organic acacia fiber or aloe juice.
- It's very important that cats with IBS stay well hydrated. Make sure your kitty has access to clean, fresh, filtered drinking water at all times. Place a few bowls around the house, or consider a pet water fountain. Also consider adding **bone broth** to her food.

- Stress is a particular problem for kitties with IBS, so it's important to make sure your cat's environment is enriched and her lifestyle is as stress-free as possible. Keep in mind that any sort of change to your kitty's environment or routine, no matter how small, is likely to unnerve her.
- Also consider the electrical stress in your cat's environment. We tend to underestimate the effect of household radiation and EMFs on sensitive animals. Pets need to be outside touching the earth in order to **ground themselves**, and many cats never get this opportunity.

## #5 Constipation

Your cat is constipated when the stool is too large and/or hard to be passed. If your kitty is straining in her litterbox but has nothing much to show for it, or if her poop is dry and hard, it's likely constipation is to blame.

Your kitty should poop every day. Expelling bowel toxins on a daily basis is an important part of the natural detoxification process. Since there are medical reasons for constipation, make sure to talk to your veterinarian if you think your kitty is constipated.

### Tips for preventing constipation in your cat:

- Feed a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet, which means the food will be 70-80% water. If your cat is eating kibble, you'll need to do a slow transition away from dry food. This process can take weeks or even months, but it's well worth the effort. Not only will it help prevent constipation, it will make your kitty much healthier overall.
- Consider adding bone broth or water to your cat's food to help lubricate the colon. You can also try adding flavoring to your kitty's water (e.g., the liquid from a can of tuna or cat food) to make it more enticing.
- Ensure your cat gets some **exercise** each day.
- Add a pinch of psyllium or coconut fiber at each meal. If hairballs are a problem, consider adding a non-petroleum hairball remedy to each meal or a dab of coconut oil to help the hair move more quickly through the GI tract.
- Some kitties benefit from 100% canned pumpkin or a natural laxative like aloe vera juice added to their food.

### Sources and References

[PetMD, April 1, 2016](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine, Volume 31, Issue 1, January/February 2017, Pages 29-35](#)

---