

Why You Should Never Ignore Your Cat's Loose Stools

If your cat develops diarrhea, or loose stools, it can be a sign of many underlying conditions. And unless your cat meets this one condition, ignoring it and doing nothing could be a regretful mistake. Whether it's acute or chronic, here's what you need to know about diarrhea in cats.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Diarrhea can quickly lead to complications, such as dehydration, so it shouldn't be ignored
- A brief episode of diarrhea that resolves on its own is often due to dietary changes
- Diarrhea that comes on without any recent dietary changes, or that's chronic or intermittent, can be caused by bacterial infections, hyperthyroidism, ingestion of foreign bodies, food allergies and more
- If the diarrhea is accompanied by other signs of illness such as blood in the stool, vomiting, loss of appetite and/or fever, it's a sign your pet is ill, and you should seek veterinary care immediately
- If your cat is otherwise healthy, treat an episode of diarrhea at home by withholding food for 12 hours and then feeding a bland diet to give the GI tract a chance rest and recuperate

If your cat develops diarrhea, or loose stools, it can be a sign of many underlying conditions. Further, because it can quickly lead to complications, such as dehydration and malnourishment, it shouldn't be ignored.

This is especially true if your cat is a kitten, a senior, pregnant or suffering from a chronic disease.¹ As a general rule of thumb, if diarrhea persists for more than 24 hours, seek veterinary care immediately — especially if the diarrhea becomes severe.

Dietary Changes Common Trigger Diarrhea in Cats

A brief episode of diarrhea that resolves on its own is often due to dietary changes. Perhaps she **licked some milk**, causing digestive upset, or nibbled another food item that disagreed with her. If you've recently changed your cat's food abruptly, it could also cause loose stools, especially if she's used to eating the same food day in and day out.

Eating only one food for many months to years conditions your cat's gut to process only one type of food and often leads to digestive issues when you try to change it up too quickly. This isn't to say you shouldn't feed a varied diet — you absolutely should. Cats fed a varied diet have stronger, more resilient gastrointestinal (GI) tracts and can typically eat different foods regularly without a problem, the key is to wean onto new foods very slowly.

Moisture-rich, minimally processed fresh foods (not kibble) are best for pets, so if you are looking to diversify your cat's diet without triggering diarrhea, introduce new foods very slowly, mixing a tiny amount of new food in with her current diet, and slowly increasing the amount as her bowels adjust.

What Else Causes Diarrhea in Cats?

Diarrhea that comes on without any recent dietary changes or medications, or that's chronic or intermittent, can be caused by many factors. Common culprits include:

- Dietary indiscretion
- **Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)**
- Pancreatitis
- Ingestion of foreign bodies
- Giardia and other parasites
- Immune-mediated disease
- Food allergies
- Viral and bacterial infections
- Megacolon
- Stress colitis (IBS) and microbiome imbalances
- Hyperthyroidism
- Cancer

Typically, if the diarrhea is acute, meaning it came on suddenly, it's due to an infectious agent, inflammation, a metabolic condition, an obstruction or something poisonous or irritating that your cat consumed. Chronic diarrhea is more likely due to a resistant infection, parasites, chronic inflammatory disease or microbiome issues, congenital disease, cancer or a metabolic disease that's not being managed correctly.²

Clues about its cause can be gleaned from figuring out whether the loose stool is coming from — namely the small bowel or the large bowel. Diarrhea from the small bowel tends to be large in volume, watery and frequent. Diarrhea that originates in the large bowel is typically smaller in volume, semi-formed (or cow pie consistency) and may contain mucus. Your cat may also poop with more frequency and strain to go.

It's possible for diarrhea to involve both the small and large bowels, or it may begin in the small bowel and lead to irritation of the large bowel. If you notice bright red, fresh streaks of blood in the stool, it's typically a sign of a large bowel (lower GI) problem. Dark, tarry stools are a sign of digested blood from the stomach or small intestine, indicating upper GI bleeding.

When Should You Worry About Cat Diarrhea?

Vomiting along with diarrhea is more often seen in diseases of the small bowel but can also occur with a large bowel problem. Mucus in the feces may be a sign of parasitic infection or dehydration. If your cat's diarrhea is green, it may be a sign of gallbladder disease. Yellow diarrhea, meanwhile, may signal liver disease, zinc poisoning or immune-mediated hemolytic anemia³ and should be checked out immediately.

If the diarrhea is accompanied by other signs of illness such as blood in the stool, vomiting, loss of appetite and/or fever, it's a sign your pet is ill, and you should seek veterinary care immediately. Before you go, collect a quarter-size sample of the feces to take with you. Place it on a piece of stiff cardboard and place it in a plastic bag for easy

transport.

While your veterinarian can get a sample from your cat during your visit, this method is much easier on your kitty. The stool sample should undergo two tests — one to check for parasite antigens and/or eggs and the other to check for bacterial or viral agents that cause diarrhea (oftentimes called a “diarrhea panel”). If necessary, your cat should receive treatment for dehydration and additional bloodwork to check for other conditions.

Microbiome analysis can also be of great benefit for chronic cases of intermittent or ongoing loose stools. If you suspect a food or diet-related hypersensitivity may be contributing to bowel issues, a Nutriscan saliva test can help identify underlying ingredient culprits.

At-Home Care for Your Cat’s Diarrhea

Once you’ve had your cat checked out and gotten a green light from your vet — meaning your cat is otherwise healthy and his behavior is normal — you can try treating diarrhea at home. My recommendation is to withhold food — never water, just food — for 12 hours. A short-term fast gives the GI tract a chance rest and recuperate.

During this time, you can administer activated charcoal mixed with bone broth or low sodium chicken broth orally with an eye dropper, which can help reduce additional bouts of loose stools. I also use homeopathic anti-diarrhea remedies during this short break from digesting food, including nux vomica, veratrum, podophyllum, arsenicum album and china, among others, depending on the cat’s specific symptoms.

Follow the 12-hour food fast with a bland diet. I recommend cooked, fat-free ground turkey and 100% canned pumpkin. Try starting with an 85% to 90% turkey/10% to 15% pumpkin blend. You can also use fresh, steamed pumpkin or cooked sweet potato. This diet can also be pureed and syringe-fed to kitties who may not feel like eating.

You should feed this bland diet to your cat until the diarrhea resolves. If it’s still ongoing after three days, or your cat becomes lethargic or stops eating, seek veterinary care right away. Sustainably sourced slippery elm powder, a neutral, healing fiber source, is another excellent tool for diarrhea. A dose of one-half teaspoon for each 10 pounds of body weight with a bland meal typically works well.

I refer to slippery elm as “nature’s Pepto-Bismol” because it reduces GI inflammation and helps bulk up the stool, slowing down its transit time. Probiotics should also be given once the stool begins to firm up. You can also offer herbs known to soothe the GI tract, such as marshmallow root, fennel and chamomile. These will help soothe cramps and other GI symptoms.

Keep in mind that diarrhea in cats is never “normal.” Any unusual bowel changes that persist or recur over time should be checked out by your integrative veterinarian to get to the root of the problem.

Sources and References

^{1, 2, 3} [PetMD January 28, 2021](#)