

## Vomiting

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So, if you've decided to read this article despite the title you are either 1. Bored and have nothing better to do, 2. Enjoy gross things, 3. Think I'm an amazing writer who can make even the grossest subjects entertaining (thank you), or most likely 4. You have now or have had in the past a pet that vomits. In fact, I would be pretty amazed at anyone who owns a cat or dog who has not had to pick up a little vomit every once in awhile.

The reason cats and especially dogs vomit so frequently is because they actually can decide to vomit, unlike us humans in which vomiting is a reflex over which we have no control. Before dogs were domesticated they would go out as a pack, kill something and eat it, then when they got back to the den they would vomit up the food for the puppies to eat. Interestingly, neither horses nor rabbits have the ability to vomit at all.

There are hundreds of causes for vomiting in animals. So veterinarians try to approach vomiting in a logical manner. The first thing we try to do is decide whether the cause is primary or secondary GI disease. Primary GI disease means there is something wrong in the gastrointestinal tract itself, like parasites, a virus, dietary indiscretion (i.e. eating trash), a foreign body, cancer and many others. Secondary GI diseases are caused by things wrong in other parts of the body, but show up as vomiting because it's so easy for animals to vomit. Examples include kidney disease, liver disease, and diabetes among others. There are a few ways to help determine whether the problem is primary or secondary GI disease. Primary GI diseases are more common in younger animals, and these animals tend to vomit multiple times in one day. They also often have diarrhea at the same time or the next day. Animals with secondary GI disease tend to be older and have other clinical signs as well, like weight loss, changes in eating and drinking and lethargy. These animals tend to vomit more sporadically and may or may not have diarrhea. Most of the secondary GI diseases are diagnosed with blood work, while the primary GI diseases can be harder to find. Because the causes are so variable we treat each vomiting pet differently. It is very important to get a good history and physical exam to start with. The next step depends on your pet, sometimes we do a fecal exam and treat supportively, and other times we do blood work, radiographs and/or other tests right away.

Although there are hundreds of causes of vomiting, there certainly are some that are more common than others. In cats the two most common are hairballs and eating too much too quickly. In dogs the most common by far is dietary indiscretion. Dogs will eat ANYTHING! Especially puppies, they are just like human babies, everything in the mouth.

Currently in my house we are learning that "everybody poops", and if you owe a dog or a cat rest assured "everybody vomits" at least occasionally. Many animals get better on their own, but always call your veterinarian with any concerns. Be prepared when you go to the veterinarian to get a lot of questions, and your pet probably won't get the same work up or even treatment plan with each episode. Many vomiting animals can be fixed, at least until they get into the trash again.