

CONSTIPATION

An Owner's Guide to Pet Care

SIGNS OF CONSTIPATION

A constipated dog or cat exhibits infrequent or difficult evacuation of the feces or stool. The feces is usually hard and dry, which increases straining and reduces stool volume.

CAUSES OF CONSTIPATION

Many things may cause constipation, but the most common are dietary and environmental factors.

Dietary:

Fiber in the diet is important for normal defecation in dogs and cats, just as it is for humans. Insufficient dietary fiber can cause constipation. On the other hand, too much fiber can cause large, dry stools as well.

Substances such as hair, bones or foreign materials ingested by a cat or dog can form hard masses, called concretions, when mixed with feces. These cannot be eliminated, resulting in constipation.

Water is essential to proper gastrointestinal function; therefore, if an animal is deprived of water, it will become constipated.

Environmental Factors:

Changes which affect an animal's daily routine such as removal of the litter box, a dirty litter box, a hospital stay, or lack of exercise can also result in constipation. There are many other causes of constipation listed below:

- Aging – older cats are particularly prone to constipation
- Fractures of the pelvis or pelvic limbs
- Lesions around the rectum
- Prostate Disease
- Spinal Cord or Intervertebral Disc Disease (slipped disc)
- Large Bowel Nervous Disorders – this is an inherited problem in cats in

which the nerve supply to the colon is inadequate. Without nerve stimulation, the muscles that squeeze the stool along don't work properly.

- Tumors
- Metabolic or Endocrine Disorders
- Debilitation
- Dehydration

As you can see, there are many reasons your pet can become constipated. Some are not serious while others may be life-threatening.

TREATMENT OF CONSTIPATION

To treat your pet for constipation, the underlying cause must first be

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determined. Your veterinarian will perform a physical examination of your pet and will ask you about your pet's medical history, its diet and its daily routine. Blood tests, x-rays or other tests may also be necessary and will be explained to you prior to testing. If it is determined that the underlying cause is due to disease or trauma, medical treatment may be necessary to correct the problem.

HOME CARE MANAGEMENT FOR CONSTIPATION

Diets rich in fiber can be used to aid in the management of constipation in pets as in humans. The fiber increases water retention in the intestines which softens the stool. The increased bulk also increases the propulsive movements of the intestine, helping to alleviate the constipation.

1. Twice daily, feed your pet a diet containing at least 10 percent fiber to stimulate bowel movement. The recommended diets are Prescription Diet Canine r/d or Canine w/d for dogs; Prescription Diet Feline r/d or Feline w/d for cats.
2. Do not give your pet bones or snacks and restrict access to foreign materials. Long-haired animals should be brushed daily. This will help remove excess hair that the animal might otherwise ingest.
3. Thirty to sixty minutes after eating, exercise the dog to encourage defecation.
4. Maintain a clean litter box for the cat.
5. Provide free access to fresh water.

Managing your pet's care at home is an important part of its treatment. It is essential you follow your veterinarian's instructions. If you have any questions about your pet's medical care, please do not hesitate to ask. Your questions are welcomed by the hospital staff.