

## UNDERSTANDING CAT DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS



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Article checked by a vet

Digestive problems are common in cats and can be the first sign that your cat is unwell. Whilst an occasional episode of vomiting or diarrhea may not always be something to worry about, recurring digestive issues, loss of appetite, constipation and abdominal pain can sometimes be indicators of an underlying illness. In this article, we look at how long it takes a cat to digest food, the common symptoms and causes of cat digestive problems, and how you can best treat and prevent them accordingly.

## Common Symptoms of Cat Digestive Issues

How long it takes a cat to digest food depends on the type of food they've eaten, as well as your cat's age and general health. A cat's digestion time can range between 10-24 hours, if all is well. However, there are various symptoms that can show if something is not quite right with your cat's digestion, listed below.

### Loss of appetite

If your cat is experiencing a loss of appetite, it can be a result of cat digestive problems or a sign of an underlying illness. Cats may occasionally skip a meal, and typically [cats feed less during summer](#). Whilst these reasons may not be cause for concern alone, cats can become ill very quickly without food. If your [cat is not eating](#) and it has been 24 hours since your cat's last meal, you should take them to the vet immediately.

## **Vomiting**

Cat vomiting is another common cat digestive problem. If you notice your cat retching, heaving or gagging, followed by vomiting of food, bile or mucus, this is classed as vomiting. Some cats may throw up undigested food from a recent meal without the motions of retching; this is known as regurgitation and signifies an issue with your cat's digestion time.

If your cat has access to the outdoors, they will inevitably find food and eat regularly without their owners knowing. When you notice symptoms of cat digestion problems, it can be difficult to identify the cause as we can never be certain what they've actually eaten. This is particularly important when we consider the number of toxins or poisons used within gardens.

Vomiting usually occurs if a cat has eaten food that has gone off, inappropriate human food, or other inedible items, but cats can even vomit after eating grass, as a result of a fur ball in their stomach, or because they are ill. Some cats vomit if they've devoured their meal too quickly, or if they have a food allergy, sensitivity or intolerance to the food they've eaten.

## **Diarrhea**

It may be difficult to know if your [cat has diarrhea](#) if they usually go to the toilet outside. However, cat diarrhea is one way to tell if there's a problem with your cat's digestion. Typically, cat poop should be solid but soft, with a formed shape. If your cat is producing loose and runny stools, or having accidents around the house, they may have diarrhea.

Diarrhea is usually caused if your cat has eaten something that is not ideal for their stomach, such as spoiled food or human food. It can also occur with new foods if your cat has a food allergy, sensitivity or intolerance to it. Cats with diarrhea can become quickly dehydrated as their faeces are leaving the body without effective water absorption.

## **Constipation**

If your cat is struggling to poop, straining with no success, or producing a smaller amount of stool than usual, they may have constipation - another sign of a cat digestive problem. Constipation is caused by faeces staying in the colon for too long, and since the colon absorbs water, the stool can become hard and dry making it difficult for your cat to pass. If your cat experiences pain whilst trying to poop, they may refuse to go which can make constipation worse.

## **Abdominal pain**

Abdominal pain can be a sign of an underlying illness or a result of cat digestive problems. Your cat might assume a hunched posture and show restlessness if they're experiencing pain in their abdomen. They may wince when you pick them up and refuse to be touched around the abdomen. Cats with abdominal pain may also have a distended, enlarged or bloated stomach, which may indicate other health issues.

## **Causes of Cat Digestive Problems**

There are different causes of cat digestive problems and these range in severity. If there is a problem with your cat's digestion, it's essential you take them to a vet to rule out any

underlying illnesses.

## **Poor diet**

Poor diets can lead to many of the cat digestive problems mentioned above, which is why it's important to provide a balanced and nutritious diet to improve your cat's digestion time. If your cat's food has a high percentage of fat or if they eat an excessive amount of treats, it can cause diarrhea. Alternatively, diets with either low or too much fibre can cause constipation. Learn more about how to [switch your cat's food](#) safely to avoid further digestive issues.

## **Hairballs**

Since cats regularly groom themselves, they may accidentally swallow some loose fur. Usually this hair will pass through their system and come out as faeces without causing harm. However, if there is a lot of hair, it can get stuck together in your cat's stomach and form a hairball. This can cause cat digestive problems, such as constipation, loss of appetite and vomiting.

## **Ingesting foreign objects**

Cats are curious creatures and may accidentally ingest a foreign object whilst exploring. Some objects may pass through your cat's system as faeces. However, other objects may get stuck in your cat's stomach and cause an intestinal blockage. This could be the case if your cat has digestive problems such as heavy vomiting, as well as showing signs of fatigue and pain. You should take your cat to the vet immediately if they have ingested any inedible objects.

## **Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)**

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is when parts of your cat's gastrointestinal (GI) tract have become inflamed. Depending on where the inflammation is, this can inhibit your cat's GI tract to work efficiently and therefore make it difficult for your cat to digest food. There are various digestive problems your cat may experience if they have IBD, including abdominal pain, vomiting and loss of appetite. If you notice any issues with your cat's digestion, it's essential to take them to the vet for a diagnosis.

## **Intestinal parasites**

All cats are susceptible to intestinal parasites such as roundworms, hookworms and tapeworms, even if they don't go outside. Intestinal parasites can affect your cat's digestion, and depending on the type they can cause diarrhea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Some cat parasites can be transferred to humans and cause serious disease. It's essential to administer routine and preventative worm treatment to your cat to prevent any infestations.

## **Liver or kidney disease**

If your cat has liver disease, their liver is not able to effectively remove toxins from the body, which can lead to a build-up. Similarly with kidney disease, your cat's kidneys are not removing waste efficiently, which can also cause a build-up of toxins in your cat's blood. Both liver and kidney disease can cause similar digestive issues, such as diarrhea, vomiting

and loss of appetite.

## Treating Cat Digestive Problems

There are various ways to treat your cat's digestive problems, and treatments will vary depending on the initial cause and severity of the issue. You can read up on our advice below, but make sure to take your cat to the vet for a thorough examination.

### Diet changes

If your cat's digestive problems are due to a poor diet, some dietary changes may resolve the issue. Make sure to provide high-quality food for your cat to ensure their diet is balanced and nutritious. Avoid excessive amounts of treats and fatty foods, and establish a balance in fibre content to avoid constipation. If your cat has food allergies, intolerances or sensitivities, or they are dealing with IBD, you may consider a hypoallergenic diet.

### Supplements

Supplements are a great way to support your cat's digestion. If your cat is experiencing constipation, fibre supplements can help regulate their bowel movements. On the other hand, if your cat has diarrhea, probiotics help maintain your cat's gut bacteria and improve digestion. If the cause of your cat's digestive problems is IBD, Omega-3 fatty acids can reduce inflammation of the gut. There are also supplements with digestive enzymes which makes it easier for your cat's GI tract to break down food.

### Prebiotics

Prebiotics are different to probiotics, as it is a dietary fibre as opposed to live bacteria. Prebiotics support the good bacteria in your cat's gut by providing nutrients for them to grow. This can improve your cat's digestion and resolve some digestive issues.

### Medications

Depending on the cause of your cat's digestive problems, your vet may prescribe medicine as part of your cat's treatment plan. Vets can prescribe antidiarrheals to treat diarrhea, or antimetetics to treat nausea and vomiting in cats. These may help return your cat's appetite to normal. If your cat has IBD, your vet may prescribe anti-inflammatory medicines, or antibiotics for any bacterial infections.

### Surgery (in severe cases)

If your cat has ingested a foreign object and it has become stuck, then your vet may need to perform surgery to remove the object.

## Preventing Cat Digestive Problems

### Feed a balanced diet

It's essential to feed your cat [the right nutrition](#) to maintain your cat's digestive health. Your cat's food should be specific to their life stage and made of high-quality ingredients to be considered a complete and balanced diet. If your cat has recurring digestive problems, you can provide [food for sensitive cats](#) that will be easier to digest. You should also resist

feeding your cat human food since this will be harder for them to digest.

## Monitor what your cat ingests

In the wild, cats would naturally choose to eat several small meals a day. If your cat devours their meal in seconds causing them to be sick, or on the other hand if they are experiencing a loss of appetite, consider feeding smaller meals more frequently instead of a large serving at once. This provides your cat the digestion time they need, and might make it easier on their stomachs.

Make sure to supervise your cat when playing with any toys, and cat-proof your home to keep small objects, cleaning chemicals and toxic plants out of reach. If your cat goes outside, check with your neighbours to see if and what they are feeding them.

## Keep your cat hydrated

Water is key for treating and preventing cat digestive problems. By keeping your cat hydrated, you can prevent problems such as vomiting and diarrhea from getting worse, and can also prevent constipation from occurring. You should ensure your cat has access to clean water at all times, and replace it with fresh water daily.

## Regular vet check-ups

It's important to take your cat to the vet regularly for check-ups. This can encourage early diagnosis of any serious illnesses, and your vet can provide advice for any cat digestive problems. You can also keep up with regular flea and worm preventative treatments from your vet.

An isolated incident of cat digestive problems is usually nothing to worry about. However, your cat can get sick quickly without adequate water and food, and some digestive problems can be a sign of something more serious. That is why it's important to keep up with regular vet checkups, and take your cat to the vet if they are experiencing any abnormal symptoms. You can also support your cat's digestion time by knowing [how much to feed your cat](#), depending on their age and lifestyle. A nutritious and balanced diet will help you maintain your cat's digestive health.

## FAQs

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### 1. How long does it take a cat to digest food?

How long it takes a cat to digest food depends on the food type and the cat's age and health, but generally it can take between 10-24 hours. Dry food can take longer due to its low-moisture content, and kittens and seniors may also take longer to digest their food.

## 2. **How do I know if my cat has digestive problems?**

You'll know if your cat has digestive problems if they experience a loss of appetite, diarrhea, vomiting, constipation, abdominal pain or swelling. Your cat's faeces or vomit may also contain blood. It's essential you take your cat to the vet for a proper examination and diagnosis.

## 3. **How can I help my cat with digestive problems?**

How you help your cat with digestive problems depends on the underlying cause and associated symptoms. Your vet may prescribe anti-diarrheal or antiemetic medication if necessary. They may also recommend improving your cat's diet, increasing fluids, electrolyte intake and dietary supplements such as probiotics and prebiotics.

## 4. **What are the symptoms of gastritis in cats?**

Gastritis is inflammation of your cat's stomach lining. The symptoms of gastritis in cats include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, weight loss, dehydration and lethargy. If you notice these symptoms, you must take your cat to the vet as gastritis can cause serious health issues if left untreated.

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