

Inflammatory Bowel Disease in Cats

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Overview and Risk

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a condition that results when your cat's immune system turns against the lining of her gastrointestinal (GI) tract, resulting in impaired absorption of nutrients and the ability to digest food properly. This wreaks havoc on your cat's entire GI tract resulting in vomiting, diarrhea, and weight loss. IBD is one of the most common causes of persistent vomiting and diarrhea in cats. Unfortunately, the cause of this debilitating disease is unknown. It is seen most often in middle-aged or older cats though younger cats may be affected as well.

Symptoms

Any cat owner knows that vomiting and diarrhea occasionally happen. After all, what fun would owning a cat be without a few hairballs? With IBD, however, the vomiting and/or diarrhea become chronic, occurring regularly rather than occasionally. Cats with IBD don't necessarily act sick, other than displaying GI symptoms.

If your pet has IBD, you may notice the following:

- Diarrhea
- Blood or mucus in stool
- Black, tarry stool (melena)
- Gas
- Straining to defecate
- Weight loss
- Increased or decreased appetite
- [Lethargy](#)
- Vomiting
- Accidents outside the litter pan

Diagnosis

Diagnosing IBD begins with a thorough physical examination and tests to rule out other possible causes of the diarrhea and/or vomiting. These tests may include the following:

- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function as well as sugar levels
- A complete blood count (CBC) to assess for infection, anemia, and other problems
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your cat is neither dehydrated nor suffering from an electrolyte imbalance

- X-rays of the abdomen to rule out GI obstruction, foreign body or masses
- An ultrasound to evaluate the integrity of your cat's digestive tract, pancreas, and other organs
- Specific tests to rule out viral infections such as [feline leukemia](#) or [feline immunodeficiency virus](#)
- Fecal tests to identify potential fecal parasites
- Special fecal tests, such as cultures and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing
- Intestinal biopsy using endoscopy, laparoscopy, or surgery to allow definitive diagnosis

Treatment

Upon diagnosing IBD in your cat, your veterinarian will recommend medications that will treat your pet's symptoms. These may include:

- Dietary modification to decrease antigenic stimulation of the GI tract
- Deworming to treat undetected intestinal parasite
- Antibiotics to treat overgrowth of bacteria
- Corticosteroids to minimize inflammation
- Others - probiotics, vitamin B12, antiemetic's, additional medication to suppress the immune system

When treating IBD, it is very important to administer all medications prescribed by your veterinarian, as well as to follow any dietary guidelines he or she suggests.

Prevention

Unfortunately, there are no preventive measures that will protect your cat from inflammatory bowel disease.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian - they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.