



*Dr Remo Lobetti*

Most pet owners will have animals that from time-to-time will have episodes of vomiting and/or diarrhoea. This tends to be more common in puppies and kittens, which fortunately in the majority of cases is self-limiting.

If the problem persists, for longer than 24 hours for diarrhoea, however, or with increasing frequency for vomiting, it is important to contact your veterinarian.

The general rule is that if the vomiting / diarrhoea is only occasional, recent duration and if your pet is reasonably bright, then there is probably not too much to worry about.

**"Mommy, I am feeling nauseous!"** Vomiting is the forceful ejection of stomach contents through the mouth. True vomiting can be preceded by apparent nausea. This is difficult to define in animals, but they may drool saliva, become anxious, or swallow frequently.

True vomiting starts with retching, which is caused by increased contractions of the abdominal muscles. The stomach then powerfully contracts and ejects its contents.

Remember that all animals will vomit occasionally. In the wild they feed their young with regurgitated food and so vomiting is Physiologically almost normal under certain circumstances.

Because humans hate to vomit, we assume that the same applies to our pets. The concern should not be the act of vomiting but the frequency and the potential causes thereof. Regurgitation may look like vomiting, but it is a far more passive event. There is no retching and no effort to eject food from the mouth. The conditions that cause regurgitation tend to allow food to accumulate in the esophagus, and an action as simple as lowering the head may result in food moving back into the mouth.

Swallowing disorders, mouth pain, or swelling around the back of the throat or the oesophagus can also result in the animal ejecting food from its mouth.

## **Did I eat something bad or am I really sick?**

The important causes of vomiting in puppies and kittens are:

### **Dietary related:**

- Dietary overload
- Change of diet
- Eating rubbish

### **Intestinal parasites:**

- Worms

### **Viral diseases**

- Distemper
- Parvo

Blockage of the intestine resulting from the swallowing of:

- Bones
- Rubber balls
- Toys
- String

## **"Mommy, I've got a runny tummy!"**

Diarrhoea is the passing of abnormal stools due to a change in the frequency, consistency, and/or volume of the faeces. There may be an increase in frequency in passing loose stools as well as straining to pass the stools.

### **The important causes of diarrhoea in puppies and kittens are:**

Dietary related:

- Change of diet
- Eating rubbish

Intestinal parasites:

- Worms
- Protozoa such as *Giardia*
- Coccidia

Viral diseases

- Distemper
- Parvo
- Corona

## **"OFF TO THE DOCTOR WITH YOU!"**

A full clinical examination is useful to determine if the abnormality appears to be within the gastrointestinal tract or if it is secondary to another health problem.

Palpation (feeling) of the abdomen does have its limits because it can only reveal structural abnormalities rather than functional ones, so blood tests are necessary to investigate the function of abdominal organs.

Following a full clinical examination the next important step in the investigation process is a full faecal examination to rule out intestinal parasites. In the majority of animals only a clinical and faecal examinations are required.

Should the animal not respond to symptomatic treatment and continue to deteriorate, or if further clinical signs develop, then further tests such as blood tests, radiographs, or ultrasonography should be performed to investigate the problem further.

Radiographs may show up obvious abnormalities but they may miss others. In these situations a barium study may be performed. Barium is given by mouth and provides a sharp contrast with the body tissue.

This outlines the edges of the stomach and intestines and can show any oddities or filling defects. An alternative to a barium study is ultrasonography, which is a quick and simple tool that allows the veterinarian to 'look' into the abdominal cavity. Further diagnostic tests could include an endoscopy. Endoscopes are fine tubes which can be slipped down the oesophagus and allow the direct visualisation of the inside of the stomach and small intestine. This is very useful to examine the lining of the upper gastrointestinal tract in a non-invasive way. If there is an obstruction, then an exploratory operation is necessary to directly handle and examine the stomach and intestines and remove the obstruction.

## **"Can you help me, doctor?"**

The majority of cases of vomiting and/or diarrhoea in puppies and kittens is managed symptomatically and includes:

**"No food! Won't I starve?"** Starvation for a 6-12 hour period, allows the intestinal tract to rest. Only water or honey and water, or an electrolyte solution should be given by mouth. It is very important that only small quantities are given at a time; this should be at body temperature.

## **"I am so hungry!"**

After the period of starvation,

- food should be re-introduced slowly
- food should ideally be a commercially available intestinal or low-residue prescription diet

## **Ask your vet about the various options available**

- white meat diet (chicken or fish, either steamed or boiled, and mixed with plain boiled rice); small amounts are fed often
- if the diarrhoea continues to lessen, the size of the meals can be slowly increased
- normal food reintroduced after about four or five days, gradually over several days, mixing the normal food in with the bland diet

## **"YOU MUST TAKE YOUR MEDICINE"**

There are a number of medications that may be utilised by your veterinarian to treat and manage vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

- anti-nausea and intestinal binding agents
- antibiotics
- intravenous fluids (if necessary)

Although antibiotics are commonly prescribed in the majority of cases, they are not necessary. Intestinal parasites require specific drugs and if the animal is dehydrated, then the use of intravenous fluids would be necessary.