



**DANADA VETERINARY HOSPITAL, P.C.**

## **Vomiting**

Vomiting is not a disease, but rather it is usually a symptom of a number of different diseases. In general, vomiting is categorized into one of two groups based on where it originates from. These are:

**Causes from outside the gastrointestinal tract (systemic disease).** Examples of systemic diseases include liver failure, kidney failure, Addison's disease (adrenals) and diabetes mellitus.

**Causes from within the gastrointestinal tract or abdomen.** Examples of these disorders include intestinal parasites, foreign bodies, dietary indiscretion, pancreatitis, inflammatory diseases of the stomach and/or intestinal tract, and cancer.

Furthermore, vomiting is categorized as acute or chronic in nature. The following information pertains primarily to acute causes of vomiting.

### ***Clinical Signs Associated with Vomiting***

Patients who experience vomiting can have highly variable symptoms depending on the duration, frequency, and severity of their vomit. Each time a pet vomits they lose water volume and electrolytes that affect the internal balance of their system. Brief, mild cases of vomiting may present with little to no other symptoms. In contrast, prolonged vomiting or vomiting with concurrent diarrhea can cause significant dehydration, altered mental states, loss of appetite, weight loss, and/or abdominal pain. Some forms of vomiting can become severe enough that blood is evident in the vomitus as well.

Your veterinarian will evaluate for dehydration, abdominal pain, fever, or other significant symptoms during their physical examination. Based on their findings and the clinical history surrounding the vomiting, they will provide a treatment plan for your pet. In general, vomiting that is accompanied by abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, fever, or dehydration requires a more prompt and aggressive approach than cases that do not involve these symptoms.

### ***Diagnosis***

Simple uncomplicated vomiting (No loss of appetite or significant physical exam abnormalities) can often be self-limiting. Some pet parents may simply choose to wait out symptoms, choose a stop-gap treatment such as an anti-vomiting medication, or temporarily switch to a bland diet until symptoms resolve. This is called symptomatic and supportive care. If the patient improved over 1-2 days, it can be an appropriate alternative to diagnostic tests for these patients. If improvement does not occur, the pet should return for a work-up.

If vomiting is associated with several of the previously mentioned significant signs, or it does not respond to initial symptom management, a series of tests may be performed in the hope that a diagnosis will be made. Diagnostic tests may include:

**Radiography (x-rays)** – This test helps to rule out masses or foreign body obstructions. It also helps to evaluate the size and shape of major organs and assess for free fluid in body cavities.

**CBC/Chemistry/T4/Urinalysis** – These tests help to screen for systemic illnesses that can cause vomiting. They also help to evaluate severity of dehydration and electrolyte imbalances. If abnormalities are found, further testing may be prompted.

**GI blood panel** – if the vomiting has been chronic and/or frequently recurrent, this panel can help to identify problems associated with upper intestinal tract or pancreas.

**Fecal Examination** – Rules out intestinal parasites which can sometime trigger vomiting as a symptom.

**Treatment trials and prophylactic deworming** – Response to medication trials such as antacids, probiotics, antibiotics, or special diets can help to rule some conditions in or out.

**Ultrasound** – Advanced imaging to help evaluate for masses, foreign material, or abnormal tissue structure not evident on x-ray.

**Biopsies of the stomach and intestinal tract** – If chronic vomiting is occurring, it is possible that the cause is a condition called inflammatory bowel disease or cancer. Once other causes have been ruled out, a biopsy of the abdomen may be the only means by which a definitive diagnosis can be obtained.

## ***Treatment***

The goal of treating vomiting is to stop fluid and electrolyte losses and replace the losses that have occurred already.

In some cases, such as a sudden onset of vomiting, the cause is self-limiting and only supportive care is needed. In this instance, treatment might involve fluid and electrolyte supplementation, medications for nausea, and offering a bland, easily digestible diet. A patient should recover within 1-2 days of receiving this care, or they should return for further evaluation and treatment.

In more serious or protracted cases of vomiting, the animal may need to be admitted to the hospital for intravenous administration of fluids, antibiotics, medications for nausea, and observation. This care needs to be continued until the pet's fluid losses have been restored, and ongoing losses (vomiting and diarrhea) are controlled.

When obstruction with foreign material is suspected as the cause of the vomiting, treatment generally involves surgical retrieval of the foreign material via abdominal exploration. If the material is identified as being only present in the stomach, an endoscopic (non-invasive) recovery may be possible.