



Mountainview Animal Hospital

WINTER NEWSLETTER



The Bottom Line

Constipation is the infrequent or difficult bowel movement resulting in less than one stool every other day. Stool accumulates in the large intestine or colon. Since it is the function of the colon to absorb water, the retained stool becomes hard and dry, which makes fecal passage even more difficult.



CONSTIPATION

Well this is not exactly a fun or glamorous subject but an important one to talk about none the less. I imagine most people have been constipated at some point in their lives. Probably from too much junk food and stress and not enough fruits, vegetables and exercise. This type of temporary constipation usually resolves when our life style returns back to normal. Or, perhaps we needed to take one of the many over the counter laxative products advertised on television. There sure are a lot of commercials on television about human bowel function.

Dogs and cats can get constipated too.

Constipation in the dog is uncommon and is usually related to something they ate. It can also be caused by an enlarged prostate gland in un-neutered males, tumours blocking the colon or neurological deficits after an accident.

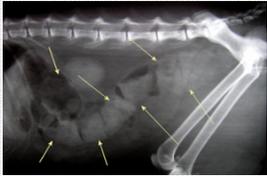
Constipation in the cat is far more common and is usually seen in middle aged to older cats. Owners may witness their cat straining to defecate. Small amounts of hard dry stool may be passed. These cats will often refuse to eat, vomit, become lethargic and loose weight. Often by the time an owner has noticed that their cat is having trouble, the constipation has already been going on for several days or longer. The cat is often dehydrated and in a fair amount of pain.

Causes of constipation

- Ingestion of foreign material, e.g., hair, ribbons, other
- Reluctance to defecate:
 - Environmental, e.g., dislike of litter tray, dirty litter tray
 - Pain, e.g., back or hindlimb pain, anal sac infections, trauma
- Dehydration, e.g., chronic kidney disease
- Thyroid disease
- Obesity/inactivity
- Electrolyte imbalances, e.g., hypokalaemia, hypercalcaemia
- Neurological dysfunction, e.g., tail pull injuries, dysautonomia, aging
- Colonic obstruction:
 - Inside the colon, e.g., cancer, polyp, stricture (narrowing)
 - Outside the colon, e.g., cancer, pelvic narrowing following pelvic fracture
- Idiopathic megacolon: a state beyond constipation whereby stool is not passed and the colon is dilated and dysfunctional. These cats often need surgery to remove the dysfunctional portion of bowel.

The Bottom Line

X-ray of a constipated cat



The arrows point to the large, hard, dry stool

It is commonly believed that a cat urinating or defecating outside the litter box is the result of bad behaviour. In older cats, it is almost always the result of a physical problem.

Did you know that many cats like canned pumpkin? One teaspoon of PURE canned pumpkin added to each meal is a great source of vitamins, water and fiber.

Never use over the counter stool softeners in cats without the direction of your veterinarian. Many of the products that are safe for humans are toxic to cats.

Diagnosing constipation

Diagnosing constipation in the cat is often not that difficult. Finding and understanding the cause of the constipation is highly important and often challenging. We need to know why the cat has become constipated, particularly if the cat has become constipated more than once.

- Blood tests: to assess kidney function, dehydration, electrolyte disturbances, thyroid disease
- Urine test: to evaluate the kidney function and assess dehydration
- X-rays and/or ultrasound: to look for foreign material, strictures or narrowing of the colon or the pelvic canal and tumours. X-rays will also be useful to see if painful degenerative joint disease (arthritis) is contributing to the cat's inability to have a bowel movement.

Treating constipation

Treating constipation requires us to remove the stool that is obstructing the cat and to treat the underlying condition that caused the constipation in the first place. We will need to treat the dehydration and electrolyte disturbances with fluids, either intravenous or subcutaneous injections. It will also be important to treat the pain this cat is experiencing. Next, we will need to remove the stool. This can be done with stool softeners, enemas and even manual extraction under a general anesthetic if necessary. Once the cat has been unblocked, the underlying problem identified and treated, we will want to focus on preventing this from occurring again.

Surgery

Only in extreme cases will surgery be required. In rare cases, constipation can worsen to a condition called megacolon. In this condition, part of the intestinal tract has lost its nerve and muscle function and has dilated. Cats with this condition will not respond well to other medical treatments and prevention and will eventually require surgery to remove the dysfunctional part of the bowel.

Prevention

Diet

In most cases we will change the constipated cat's diet to a food that is high in soluble fiber. This will make the stools softer and more slippery in the intestines. A good diet will also consider urinary tract health, be easy to digest, have high levels of Omega fatty acids and antioxidants. Our diet choice may change however, if we also have to consider other diseases. Cats that are obese will require a weight loss diet first. We will likely recommend a diet formulated for kidney support in cats with underlying kidney disease.

Dehydration

Many older cats have some degree of kidney dysfunction. This will predispose these cats to dehydration. It is important, not just for the constipation but also for the kidneys, to keep these cats drinking. Keeping more water sources around the house and giving older cats easier access to water is important. Adding canned food to their diet and even adding more water to the canned food is very helpful.

Stool softeners, intestinal motility enhancers and fiber

Many cats who have had trouble with constipation in the past will need daily treatment with a stool softer or extra fiber supplements. Some cats will also need medication to stimulate the intestines to contract more efficiently. These medications may be prescribed by a veterinarian.

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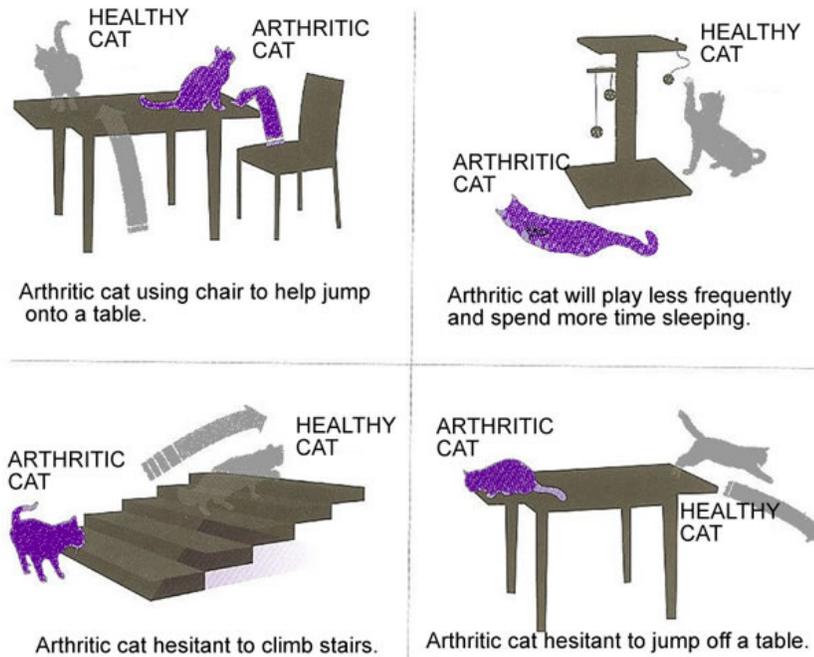
Litter box rules:

1. Location, location, location. Place multiple boxes around the house.
2. There should be at least one litter box per cat, plus one.
3. Avoid putting the litter box in noisy areas like adjacent to the furnace, washer or dryer.
4. Ideally each cat in the house should have a box in their territory.
5. Scoop daily, dump and start with fresh litter weekly.
6. Make sure the box is large enough, large rubbermaid sweater storage boxes make great litter boxes.
7. Use unscented litter.
8. Small hard, dry poops might mean your cat is becoming constipated. This is a good time to check with your veterinarian.

Pain

Most people over the age of 45 will complain about aches and pains fairly regularly even though they are not limping or avoiding activities yet. Well, the same is true for any of our cats over the age of 8 years. While they may still look good to us, they are slowly starting to feel the effects of arthritis and the older they get, the more they will ache. Painful cats will exercise less, gain weight, avoid the litter box and push less when having a bowel movement; all of which can lead to constipation. There are great diets, supplements and medications available today to keep our feline friends pain free.

HOW TO RECOGNISE SUBTLE CHANGES IN YOUR CAT



Litter box

This is the most overlooked necessity for our cats. To our cats, the litter box is often located in the most inconvenient area of the house. Older cats with arthritis and poor vision are forced to travel a long way to use the bathroom, often in the dark. It is no wonder that they either hold it in, causing constipation, or poop on our floors. Move the box to a more convenient location or better yet add another box elsewhere in the house. Make sure it is scooped daily, there is nothing worse than using an unflushed toilet. Many litter boxes have very high rims, cut it down to make it easier to step into. If the box has a cover, remove it.

Medication

In addition to medications prescribed specifically for the treatment of the constipation, cats may also require additional medications for other concurrent diseases. Cats with thyroid disease, kidney disease or diabetes mellitus will need to have these conditions treated.

While there is clearly some work to be done on the constipated cat to regain regularity, with some consistent medical management, most cats will return to fairly normal lives.

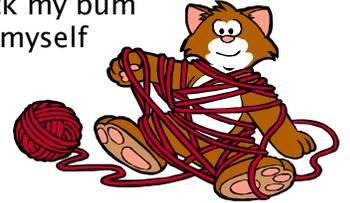
The Bottom Line

The Emergency Veterinary Clinic on HWY 10

- Licensed Veterinarians and Registered Technicians are on site waiting to care for your pet's emergency needs
- It is designed and equipped for the assessment and treatment of trauma cases, intensive care treatment, on-site blood and urine testing, radiology (x-ray) services, anesthesia and emergency surgery, and continued care for chronic and life-threatening illnesses
- It provides for 24 hour constant monitoring of your pet in conjunction with your family veterinarian
- The Emergency Veterinary Clinic will transfer your pet's medical record directly to your family veterinarian after the emergency care is complete, providing safe continuity of care

TIME WITH TUX

Well, who knew constipation could be so complicated? I learned about it a few weeks ago when I met Bandit. That poor cat was so constipated that Dr. Ewing had to pull the poop out with forceps while he was under anesthetic. I was so embarrassed for him that I couldn't even look him in the eye. They got the poop out of him, and now he is on special food and taking medicine every day. I hear he is doing great. I never want to be in his shoes though. So I have developed a plan! Have you heard that commercial where Jamie Lee Curtis recommends eating a yogurt a day to keep you regular? Well, now I have an excuse to keep stealing the staffs yogurt. And when they get mad at me for eating their snack, I'll just turn and stick my bum in the air as I walk away, to remind them that I'm just keeping myself regular.



HOLIDAY HOURS



Dec. 24 th - Christmas Eve:	Open 9:00 - 12:00
Dec. 25 th - Christmas Day:	Closed
Dec. 26 th - Saturday:	Closed
Dec. 27 th - Sunday:	Closed
Dec. 31 st - New Years Eve:	Open 9:00 - 12:00
Jan 1 st - New Years Day:	Closed
Jan 2nd - Saturday:	Reception only
Jan 3rd - Sunday:	Closed

Unless otherwise specified here, Mountainview Animal Hospital will be open during its regular office hours. Animals in the hospital over the holidays will receive the same great care and attention as always. For those patients requiring emergency care over Christmas and New Years, The Emergency Veterinary Clinic on Hwy 10 will be open to serve your pet's medical and surgical needs. You can call ahead at 905-495-9907 or go directly there. The Emergency Veterinary Clinic is located on the south east corner of highway 10 and Wexford Rd, just one block north of Bovaird (Highway 7).

From all of us at Mountainview Animal Hospital,
we wish all of you

**A Very Merry Christmas, A Joyous
Holiday Season and A Happy New Year!**