

Vomiting

Vomiting is not a specific disease; it usually is a sign of a number of different diseases. In general, the veterinarian must decide whether the cause of vomiting is more likely to fall into a particular category of causes. These are:

1. Vomiting caused by a disorder outside the gastrointestinal tract (systemic disease). Examples of systemic diseases include liver failure, kidney failure, and diabetes mellitus.
2. Vomiting caused by a disorder within the gastrointestinal tract or abdomen. Examples of these disorders include intestinal parasites and viruses, dietary indiscretion, pancreatitis, inflammatory diseases of the stomach and/or intestinal tract, and cancer.

Clinical Signs

Initially, it must be determined how ill the pet has become as a consequence of the vomiting. When the vomiting has led to more serious problems, any of the following might be noted:

1. Diarrhea
2. Dehydration
3. Loss of appetite
4. Abdominal pain
5. High fever
6. Depression
7. Bloody vomiting

Causes

As noted above, the veterinarian must determine the source of the vomiting (systemic cause vs. gastrointestinal tract).

Many cases of vomiting are self-limiting after a few days, and the cause may never be determined. Less commonly, vomiting may result from a serious illness. Even when vomiting is caused by mild illnesses, it may lead to death of the animal if treatment is not begun early enough to prevent severe fluid and electrolyte losses.

Diagnosis

If vomiting is associated with several of the above signs, a series of tests may be performed in the hope that a diagnosis will be made.

Diagnostic tests may include blood tests, radiography (x-rays) with or without barium, ultrasound studies, biopsies of the stomach and intestinal tract, and exploratory abdominal surgery. Once the diagnosis is known, treatment may include special medications, diets, and/or surgery.

Treatment

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 intravenous fluid and electrolyte supplementation, medications for nausea, and limiting oral intake of food and water. It is important to prevent dehydration from developing while additional diagnostics or treatments are underway.

Prognosis

The prognosis is dependent upon identification and treatment of the underlying cause for the vomiting. In some instances, the problem will be self-limiting or caused by a treatable disease. In other cases, vomiting is a sign of a more serious underlying disorder.