

Acute (Short-Term) Vomiting & Diarrhoea

What causes acute vomiting and diarrhoea?

Vomiting and diarrhoea are the body's response to a large number of problems. Usually, the problem is in the gastrointestinal tract (stomach and intestines) itself. Occasionally, the problem may be in a different part of the body entirely.

Acute (meaning short-term) vomiting and diarrhoea are most commonly caused by:

- "Dietary indiscretion" i.e. eating something that doesn't agree with your pet
- Viral, bacterial, or parasitic infections
- "Foreign bodies" i.e. non-digestible objects such as stones, clothing, and toys
- Medications, especially NSAIDs such as meloxicam (Loxicom/Metacam)

However, there are a significant number of causes, ranging from benign to serious.

When should I see a vet?

Most cases of acute vomiting and diarrhoea can be managed at home. However, given that some cases can be more serious, contact your vet if you are unsure. Seeing a vet is particularly important in the following cases:

- Very young or elderly pets, as they are more prone to dehydration
- Severe lethargy or complete appetite loss (cats mustn't go beyond 3 days without food)
- Persistent frequent vomiting, especially if your pet cannot keep water down, or is young or known to eat foreign objects (these can all indicate an obstruction)
- Blood in the vomit or diarrhoea
- The frequency or severity is not improving after 2-3 days
- Your pet has an underlying medical condition, such as diabetes
- Your pet has eaten something known to be toxic

How can I treat acute vomiting and diarrhoea at home?

Just as in people, hydration and opportunities to access a toilet are important when a pet has vomiting or diarrhoea. You can try:

- Providing fresh water in multiple places
- Letting your dog out to toilet frequently, or providing more litter trays for a cat
- Offering a bland, palatable, easily-digestible diet such as boiled chicken and rice, scrambled egg, or boiled white potato
- Feeding little and often – this is better than starving the intestines, as this can delay their repair
- Adding probiotics such as Promax or Fortiflora
- Keeping exercise light and short
- Stop giving NSAIDs such as Loxicom, Metacam, Onsior, Rimadyl, or Previcox. Do not stop other medications without first contacting your vet

As frustrating as messes can be, avoid scolding your pet for having accidents in the house when they are unwell. In case your pet has something contagious, it is best to keep them away from other animals while they are unwell.

What can my vet do for acute vomiting and diarrhoea?

If your pet is still well hydrated and there are no other significant concerns, your vet may give an anti-sickness injection and dispense a probiotic. They may give pain relief if needed.

If your vet is suspicious of a foreign body, they might suggest admission for x-rays.

If your pet is dehydrated or your vet is otherwise concerned, they may recommend admission for blood tests, fluids, and medications in hospital such as anti-sickness and pain relief. Often, a night or two on this supportive treatment is enough to get most pets back on their feet.