



Cat vet



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Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

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The most common signs of hypertension are related to the eyes, kidneys, heart and central nervous system. Sudden blindness, blood in the urine, weakness, convulsions and unexplained nose bleeds may all be seen in dogs with hypertension. The management of hypertension in dogs and cats involves identifying and treating any underlying conditions, as well as medications that reduce blood pressure.

Clearly it would be preferable to diagnose and treat hypertension before it has a chance to cause serious organ damage. This raises the obvious question for pet owners, should I make sure my pet's blood pressure gets checked once or twice a year?

The answer to that question is not clear cut. The nature of the testing procedure for blood pressure in dogs and cats is such that some patients will test positive for high blood pressure, when in fact they do not really have high blood pressure. This is called a "false positive" result. Routine testing for young and apparently healthy dogs would result in an unacceptably large number of normal dogs being falsely diagnosed and treated. Ultimately, it is best that your veterinarian uses his or her judgement to determine if your pet should have its blood pressure checked.

Once diagnosed most pets with hypertension can be managed with medication. Keeping the blood pressure at a more normal level will help prevent the undesirable signs of sustained high blood pressure. Finally, whilst current evidence suggests "lifestyle factors" such as obesity, high salt diets and lack of exercise don't play a major role in causing hypertension in dogs, there is ample evidence that they do contribute to a myriad of other problems in our pets. Enough incentive to keep our pets fit and healthy!



Diarrhoea in Cats

Diarrhoea is a loose term (pardon the pun!) for increased water in the faeces. This is a common reason for owners to bring their cat to the vet, but can have many different causes. Descriptions of poo are never pleasant, but it is something we ask people about when dealing with diarrhoea, so if you aren't too squeamish, have a bit of a close look at the stool before cleaning it up. And if you're about to have lunch, you might want to read the rest of this article at a later time!

We can characterise diarrhoea by categorising it as acute (generally less than 2-3 weeks duration), or chronic (greater than 2 weeks in duration); small bowel or large bowel; by the severity; or by the disease process taking place. Small intestinal diarrhoea tends to be more watery with increased volume of faeces produced, and a moderate increase in the frequency of defaecation. There can be loss of weight, and if blood is present it is dark and digested and usually through the faeces (not around the stool). In contrast, diarrhoea originating in the large bowel tends to make the cat go to the toilet with more urgency, and they show signs of pain (often increased vocalising). There is usually mucus visible on the stool, and if there is blood it is red and on the outside of the stool. Characterisation is helpful in determining the cause and therefore the treatment options. In the simplest cases we may simply examine the cat and recommend a short term diet change, but in the more severe cases we may have to perform many diagnostic tests to get to the bottom (oops, another pun!) of the problem. Mild diarrhoea for a couple of days in an otherwise healthy cat is going to require a different approach to a cat with other issues, for example if there has been weight loss or if the cat is clinically unwell.

Diarrhoea is frequently seen in kittens, as they are still developing their immune systems and are often in more contact with infectious agents that cause diarrhoea. They can become seriously ill much more quickly in this age group as they have less reserve to fight the diarrhoea and keep them going whilst unwell. Any kitten showing signs of illness should be checked by the vet as soon as possible, as they can deteriorate quickly. Often an examination is all that is done, but sometimes we need to do faecal and/or blood tests. The most common cause for diarrhoea in young cats is infection, so they will often require specific medications (eg worming medication, antibiotics or anthelmintics), as well as general support like fluid therapy to rehydrate them, and dietary change.

As kittens grow older and their immune system matures, the main causes for diarrhoea will change. The first thing to determine (after determining if small or large bowel in origin) will be whether the pathology is based mainly in the gastro-intestinal system or if there may be other body systems involved, like the liver or thyroid gland. Blood and urine tests will be the most helpful diagnostic aids for checking this. If there is evidence of another body system being involved, then further diagnostics and treatments will be directed towards this, and the diarrhoea should resolve subsequently. If we rule out extra gastro-intestinal disease, then we need to try to determine the type of disease process going on in the intestines.

Other investigations that may be recommended include ultrasound, endoscopy and even surgery to obtain biopsies. These tests aren't recommended unless there is an ongoing process that is detrimental to the overall health of the cat, but they can become mandatory to determine the best treatment options and of course so we know what the long-term outcome is likely to be.

If a simple enteritis (for example viral) is likely to be the cause of the diarrhoea, then fasting the cat for 24 hours is usually recommended, with small amounts of water available. Puss will obviously need to be kept inside for this time so there is no chance of going to the neighbours for a snack. If there is significant dehydration present, then intravenous fluids, or a drip will be advised—often the patient recovers a lot more quickly with the supportive care. When started back on food, small meals are given often through the day, and the food should be highly digestible and low residue. There are a number of commercial prescription diets that can be used, or even cooked chicken breast meat (without the skin or fat) fits this description. If all is going well, then the normal diet can usually be re-introduced after a few days.

If there is a significant amount of blood in the stool, or if there is a fever present, then antibiotics may be indicated. We usually don't use antibiotics for diarrhoea as a general rule as they in themselves can be a cause of gastro-intestinal upset, and we don't want to upset the balance of normal flora in the gut unless the specific indication is there.

An increasingly common disease process we are seeing over time, especially in older cats is Inflammatory Bowel Disease, or IBD. The most usual clinical signs we see in cats with this problem are vomiting and/or weight loss, but sometimes diarrhoea is the presenting complaint. This disease process unfortunately needs tissue samples (taken at surgery) for a definitive diagnosis. There is a type of cancer called small cell lymphoma which can be very similar to IBD, and they have similar treatments, but we are more aggressive with the lymphoma treatment. It is worth noting here that we have pretty good success rates with treating both IBD and small cell lymphoma, so it is worthwhile pursuing the diagnosis, and starting treatment to see how your pet goes. These days a diagnosis of cancer (certain types anyway), is not necessarily the terrible thing it was even a few years ago. Treatment for both IBD and small cell lymphoma is long-term (often lifelong), and suppresses the immune system, so we need to be sure of our diagnosis before starting therapy. Diet change is another critical factor in treatment, usually trying a food with different protein source to that they have been used to, and is also long-term.

In summary, diarrhoea is not a diagnosis in itself—it is a clinical sign and can be due to many different disease processes. Determining the disease process by a logical step-by-step process is the best way to address the problem and help get the patient better.

