**Common Conditions**

Cats are susceptible to a wide range of illnesses. Research common feline diseases and conditions, along with drugs, treatments, and home care.

## Cats and Compulsive Scratching, Licking, and Chewing

WebMD discusses common reasons why your cat might be biting, chewing, or scratching itself.

By Hilary Parker  
WebMD Pet Health Feature

Reviewed by [Audrey Cook, BVM&S](http://www.webmd.com/audrey-cook-biography)

Most [cats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm) are meticulous groomers, but what happens when the [behavior](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/aging-cat-behavior) goes into overdrive? For a variety of reasons, some cat licking, scratching, and chewing behaviors become compulsive, which can annoy you and damage your pet’s skin and coat.

If your cat is scratching, licking, or chewing herself compulsively, it is likely you regularly catch her in the act. But if you don’t, your first clue may be the disappearance of your cat’s fur, often in strips along her back or stomach. Cats with self-mutilating behaviors may also cause red, irritated areas called hot spots to form, but they are less likely than dogs to do so.

Although compulsive cat scratching, licking, or chewing behaviors can develop in any animal, they are more commonly observed in Siamese cats and other Oriental breeds. Female cats are more likely than males to lick, chew, or pull on their fur.

Because there are a number of medical problems that may result in scratching and licking behaviors, be sure to consult with your veterinarian to help determine the cause and the best course of action.

[[](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cats-and-compulsive-scratching-licking-and-chewing)](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cats-and-compulsive-scratching-licking-and-chewing)

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## [Cat Behavioral Problems](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cats-and-compulsive-scratching-licking-and-chewing)

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[**Common Skin Problems in Cats**](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/slideshow-skin-problems-in-cats)

### Why Do Cats Compulsively Scratch, Lick, or Chew?

**Parasites.** [Fleas](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/flea-prevention) are often the culprits behind compulsive cat scratching or cat licking behaviors. Because cats are excellent groomers, they may actually remove all traces of [fleas](http://pets.webmd.com/ss/slideshow-flea-and-tick-overview). If you notice your cat licking his lower back obsessively, with or without scabs on the neck, it is a sign that [fleas](http://pets.webmd.com/rm-quiz-fleas-ticks) might be causing the problem. Other parasites, including ticks, mites, and ringworm, can also prompt scratching, licking, or chewing.

**Allergies.** Just as some people develop skin irritations in response to certain foods or environmental triggers, cats may have itchy, irritated skin if they are allergic to something in their environment.

**Dry skin.** Dry winter air or nutritional inadequacies can contribute to dry, flaky skin that gets your cat started licking or scratching in search of relief.

**Pain.** If you notice your cat licking or biting at the same spot over and over again, it could be that he is experiencing pain or discomfort in that area.

**Boredom, anxiety, or compulsive disorder.** Compulsive cat chewing, scratching, or licking behaviors often develop in cats who are bored, stressed, or anxious. These mental disorders are more likely to occur in indoor cats, which may be due to the fact that they receive less exercise and excitement than outdoor cats. Compulsive disorders often begin when there are changes in a cat’s environment, including a new animal or baby in the house or a move to a new location. Also, behaviors that started in response to a medical problem sometimes persist as compulsions after the condition is resolved.

**Eliminating parasites.** Because it can be difficult to diagnose flea infestation in cats, some veterinarians recommend trying reliable flea control products purchased from a veterinary office for six to eight weeks to see if it reduces the incidence of licking, scratching, or chewing. Similarly, treating mites or other parasites, if present, can eliminate your cat’s discomfort and the problem behaviors.

**Changing foods.** Putting cats that are scratching or chewing on a 6-week exclusion diet is a good way to find out whether food allergies are the problem. You may have to try several diets before you find one that works. Veterinarians may also prescribe the addition of certain fatty acids or other nutritional supplements if dry skin is to blame for your cat’s incessant scratching and licking. No other foods or [treats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-treats-and-snacks-whats-healthy) should be offered during an exclusion diet trial.

**Using medication.** Depending on the extent of skin damage your cat has caused by licking, chewing, or scratching, your veterinarian may prescribe the use of steroids, antihistamines, and [antibiotics](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/antibiotics-for-cats). Additionally, some compulsive cat behaviors caused by psychological factors can be addressed with clomipramine, an anti-anxiety medication, or amitriptyline, which helps fight anxiety and also functions as an antihistamine.

**Addressing anxiety or boredom.** If you and your vet determine that there is no physical cause for your pet's behaviors, there are things you can do to improve your cat’s state of mind. Making sure your cat feels safe, loved, and comfortable in your home is important, as is providing adequate stimulation and exercise. You may find that desensitizing your cat by slowly and carefully exposing her to things she fears can be beneficial. Be careful to take baby steps if you try this so as not to overwhelm your cat and make the compulsive licking, scratching or biting worse. Counter-conditioning, by training your cat to associate something pleasurable, like a treat, with something he fears may also help reduce stress and anxiety. Many times, boredom licking (also known as psychogenic alopecia) is improved by adding another cat or pet. But, there is always the risk that the second cat could be a new stress in your pet's environment that could make the [hair loss](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/diseases-hair-loss-cats) worse.

**Feline Diabetes: Symptoms, Treatments, Prevention, and Diet Tips**

Thomas Graves and WebMD team up to provide feline diabetes information and tips for treatment or prevention.

By Sandy Eckstein  
WebMD Pet Health Feature

Reviewed by [Audrey Cook, BVM&S](http://www.webmd.com/audrey-cook-biography)

An alarming number of [cats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm) are developing [diabetes](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/feline-diabetes-symptoms-treatments-prevention-diet) mellitus, which is the inability to produce enough insulin to balance blood sugar, or glucose, levels **.** Left untreated, it can lead to [weight loss](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/weight-loss-in-cats), loss of appetite, vomiting , [dehydration](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/dehydration-cats), severe depression, problems with motor function, coma, and even death. To find out why so many cats are being diagnosed with diabetes, and what owners can do, WebMD talked to Thomas Graves, a former feline practitioner who is associate professor and section head of small animal medicine at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine. Graves’ research focus is on diabetes and geriatric medicine.

**Q: How common is feline diabetes?**

A: The true incidence isn’t known, but it’s estimated at 0.5% to 2% of the feline population. But it’s also probably under diagnosed.

**Q: What are the signs of diabetes in cats?**

A: The main symptoms are increased thirst and increased urination. And while we do see it in cats with appropriate body weight, it’s more common in obese cats. Some cats with diabetes have a ravenous appetite because their bodies cannot use the fuel supplied in their diet.

**Q: What’s the treatment for a cat with feline diabetes?**

A: Diet is certainly a component. It’s felt that a low-carbohydrate diet is probably best for cats with diabetes. Treatment is insulin therapy. There are some oral medications, but they have more side effects and are mainly used when insulin can’t be used for some reason. There are blood and urine tests, physical examinations, and behavioral signals, which are used to establish insulin therapy. This is done in conjunction with your veterinarian. We don’t recommend owners adjust insulin therapy on their own because it can be sort of complicated in cats. Most patients come in every three or four months. It’s a good thing to make sure nothing else is going on.

## Diarrhea Causes and Treatments for Cats

[Diarrhea](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/the-scoop-on-cat-poop) is characterized by frequent loose or liquid bowel movements. It can be caused by something as simple as a change in diet or a more serious illness or infection. Diarrhea may be sudden in onset and short in duration. It can also last for weeks to months or occur off and on. A single bout of diarrhea is generally not a cause for concern in [cats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm)-but if it persists for more than a day or two, it can lead to [dehydration](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/dehydration-cats).

### What Causes Diarrhea?

* Change in diet
* Dairy or other food intolerance
* Ingestion of spoiled food
* Allergic reaction
* Bacterial or viral infection
* Internal parasites, such as roundworms, coccidia and Giardia
* Inflammatory bowel disease
* Kidney or liver disease
* [Cancer](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cancer-in-cats-types-symptoms-prevention-and-treatment) or other tumors of the digestive tract
* Certain medications
* Hyperthyroidism
* Colitis

### What Are the General Symptoms of Diarrhea?

Loose, frequent stools are the most common symptoms of diarrhea. Other signs include flatulence, the passage of blood in mucus or stool and straining to defecate. Lethargy, dehydration, [fever](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/fevers-in-cats), vomiting, decreased appetite, [weight loss](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/weight-loss-in-cats) and an increased urgency to defecate may also accompany diarrhea.

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If your cat’s diarrhea is accompanied by bloody or black stools, he could be experiencing internal bleeding of the stomach or small intestine and should be examined by a vet immediately.

### How Do I Treat Diarrhea?

It is often recommended that you avoid giving your pet any food for 12-24 hours while he’s experiencing diarrhea, but do provide plenty of fresh, clean water to stave off dehydration. Check with your veterinarian about the proper course of treatment for your cat’s specific case.

### When Should I Take My Cat to the Vet?

Bring your cat to the vet if his diarrhea continues for more than a day, or if you observe lethargy, vomiting, fever, dark-colored or bloody stools , straining to defecate, decreased appetite or unexplained weight loss.

## Diarrhea Causes and Treatments for Cats

### What Is Hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is the most common glandular disorder in cats. It is most frequently caused by an excessive concentration of circulating thyroxine-a thyroid hormone better known as T4-in the bloodstream.

### What Are the Symptoms of Hyperthyroidism?

[Weight loss](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/weight-loss-in-cats) and increased appetite are among the most common clinical signs of this condition. Weight loss is seen in 95 to 98 percent of hyperthyroid cats, and a hearty appetite in 67 to 81 percent. Excessive thirst, increased urination, hyperactivity, unkempt appearance, [panting](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/abnormal-breathing-cats), [diarrhea](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/the-scoop-on-cat-poop) and increased shedding have also been reported. Vomiting is seen in about 50 percent of affected cats. Clinical signs are a result of the effect of increased T4 levels on various organ systems.

### What Breeds/Ages Are Prone to Hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism can occur in any breed of cat, male or female, but occurs almost exclusively in older animals. Less than 6 percent of cases are younger than 10 years of age; the average age at onset is between 12 and 13 years.

### How Is Hyperthyroidism Diagnosed?

Because several common diseases of older cats-[diabetes](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/feline-diabetes-symptoms-treatments-prevention-diet), inflammatory bowel disease, intestinal [cancer](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cancer-in-cats-types-symptoms-prevention-and-treatment) and chronic [kidney failure](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/kidney-failure-uremia-symptoms-cats)-share some of the clinical signs of hyperthyroidism, a battery of tests is in order. A CBC, chemistry panel and urinalysis alone will not diagnose hyperthyroidism, but they can certainly rule out diabetes and kidney failure. Hyperthyroid cats may have normal findings on the CBC and urinalysis, but the chemistry panel often shows elevation of several liver enzymes.

In the vast majority of cases, a definitive diagnosis of hyperthyroidism is based on a simple blood test that shows elevated T4 levels in the bloodstream. Unfortunately, between 2 percent and 10 percent of cats with hyperthyroidism will have normal T4 levels. One possible explanation for this is that in mild cases, T4 levels can fluctuate in and out of the normal range. Another is that concurrent illness will suppress elevated T4 levels, lowering them into the normal or high-normal range and fooling the veterinarian into thinking that the cat’s thyroid status is normal. Because these are geriatric cats, concurrent illness is fairly common, and diagnosis of hyperthyroidism in these cats can be tricky.

### How Is Hyperthyroidism Treated?

Several treatment options for hyperthyroidism exist, each with advantages and disadvantages.

* Oral administration of antithyroid medication. Methimazole (brand name TapazoleTM) has long been the mainstay of drug therapy for feline hyperthyroidism. It is highly effective in correcting the condition, often within two to three weeks. Unfortunately, about 10%-15% of cats will suffer side effects, such as loss of appetite, vomiting, lethargy, and occasionally blood cell abnormalities. Rare but more serious side effects include severe facial itching with self-induced trauma, blood clotting disorders, or liver problems. Most side effects are mild and eventually resolve, although some necessitate discontinuation of the medication. Lifelong daily medication is required, which is a disadvantage to owners whose cats resist pilling. CBC and T4 levels need to be rechecked regularly for the remainder of the cat’s life.
* Surgical removal of the thyroid gland. Hyperthyroidism is usually caused by a benign tumorcalled a thyroid adenoma that involves one or, more often, both thyroid glands. Fortunately, most hyperthyroid cats have benign, well-encapsulated tumors that are easily removed. Surgery usually results in a palliation and not a cure, but [anesthesia](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/anesthesia-cats) can be challenging in these older patients whose disease may have affected their hearts and other organs. Although surgery may seem costly, it often ends up being less expensive than years of oral medication and regular bloodwork rechecks.
* Radioactive iodine therapy. This is probably the safest and most effective treatment option. Radioactive iodine, given by injection, becomes concentrated in the thyroid gland, where it irradiates and destroys the hyperfunctioning tissue. No anesthesia or surgery is required, and only one treatment is usually needed to achieve a cure. It used to be that radioiodine treatment was performed only in specialized, licensed facilities, but many private treatment facilities are now found throughout the country. Hospitalization may be prolonged; depending on local or state ordinances, cats may need to be kept at the treatment facility for 10 to 14 days until the level of radioactivity in their urine and feces decreases to an acceptable level. Also, radioiodine therapy is costly. The price tag has come down from about $1,200 to between $500 and $800-but this is still prohibitive for many cat owners.

## Kidney Disease in Cats

[Cats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm) with kidney problems have a reduced ability to excrete waste products into their urine, leading to a potentially toxic build-up in the bloodstream. While some kidney problems occur suddenly, chronic [kidney disease](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-kidney-disease) shows up more slowly over a period of time. Timely veterinary assessment with ongoing supportive care and dietary management can allow some cats with kidney problems to maintain an adequate quality of life.

### What Causes Kidney Problems?

The following are some causes of both chronic and acute kidney problems:

* [High blood pressure](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/hypertension-high-blood-pressure-cats)
* Infection
* Immunological disease
* Congenital or hereditary disease
* [Cancer](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cancer-in-cats-types-symptoms-prevention-and-treatment)
* Decreased blood flow to kidneys
* Kidney trauma
* Urinary obstructions such as kidney stones
* Exposure to toxins, especially antifreeze

### What Are Some Signs of Kidney Problems?

If your cat shows any of the following symptoms, please take her to see your veterinarian.

* Appetite loss/decrease
* [Weight loss](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/weight-loss-in-cats)
* Vomiting or diarrhea
* Lethargy or depression
* [Dehydration](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/dehydration-cats)
* Change in water consumption
* Pain in the kidney area
* [Litter box](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-litter-litter-boxes) aversion
* Mouth ulcers
* [Bad breath](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/bad-breath-cats)
* [Constipation](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/the-scoop-on-cat-poop)
* Bloody or cloudy urine
* Urinating in abnormal places or pain when urinating
* Stumbling, acting drunk

### Which Cats Are Prone to Kidney Problems?

Kidney disease is most prevalent in older cats, but can occur in cats of any age. Cats can be born with abnormal kidneys that never function properly. Some breeds, like Persians, are predisposed to such hereditary kidney problems.

Additionally, outdoor cats run the risk of acute problems because they have more chance of exposure to toxins that can cause [kidney failure](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/kidney-failure-uremia-symptoms-cats), namely antifreeze.

### How Are Kidney Problems in Cats Diagnosed?

There are various ways to determine if a cat has kidney disease. Your veterinarian will perform a physical examination and take blood and urine samples to see if there is a problem with your pet’s kidneys. Radiographs, ultrasound, blood pressure measurement or biopsy of the kidney may also be performed.

### How Are Kidney Problems in Cats Treated?

It may be difficult to determine a specific cause of kidney disease. Emergency treatment and hospitalized care may be needed depending on the stage of kidney failure a cat is in. Acute kidney disease can sometimes be caught early on, when there is minimal damage to the kidneys. In some cases, long-term supportive treatment is beneficial. The following are possible treatments:

* Treatment of underlying cause of kidney failure (e.g. antifreeze toxicity, infection)
* Drugs to enhance urine production
* Therapeutic diet
* Management of electrolyte abnormalities
* Fluid therapy
* Correction of [anemia](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/anemia-cats-types-symptoms)
* Medication for high blood pressure, vomiting or gastrointestinal problems
* Dialysis
* Kidney transplant

### Should Cats with Kidney Problems Be Fed a Special Diet?

Feeding your cat a special diet will not cure kidney disease, but managing your cat’s intake of protein, phosphorous and sodium can help diminish symptoms and add to your pet’s overall health and longevity. There are many commercially available veterinary diets for cats with chronic kidney disease.

Please remember, changes in your cat’s diet should not be made abruptly. Speak to your vet about gently transitioning your cat to a new food.

### How Can I Care for my Cat at Home?

Be diligent with your cat’s eating regimen, keeping strictly to the diet your vet has prescribed. Always give her access to clean, fresh water, keep your home environment as calm as possible and make sure she has routine medical checkups and tests as advised by your vet.

### How Can Kidney Problems Be Prevented?

Do not give your cat any over-the-counter medications without instruction by your veterinarian, and make sure she has access to fresh water at all times.

### What Happens if a Cat's Kidney Problems Go Untreated?

If acute kidney failure is not recognized and treated, cats can suffer varying degrees of permanent kidney damage and even death. Chronic kidney failure causes many secondary problems over time, including a decrease in calcium levels that can lead to bone demineralization. Anemia may also occur as the kidneys lose the ability to produce a hormone that stimulates red blood cell production. Ultimately, if left untreated, kidney failure is fatal.

## Urinary Tract Problems in Cats

Problems that affect a cat’s lower urinary system often prevent the bladder from emptying correctly or may even cause fatal blockage of the urethra, the tube connecting the bladder to the outside of the body. Very often the culprit is Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD). Once called Feline Urologic Syndrome (FUS), FLUTD is not merely one problem, but a collection of clinical symptoms that may have more than one possible cause. Symptoms of FLUTD include frequent or painful urination, bloody urine and frequent licking of the urinary opening. One key to treating FLUTD is to determine the root cause, which may include bladder stones, urinary tract blockage, infection or [cancer](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cancer-in-cats-types-symptoms-prevention-and-treatment). If the cause of these symptoms cannot be determined, the cat is considered to have bladder inflammation (cystitis).

For upper urinary tract issues in [cats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm), please see our article on [Kidney Problems](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-kidney-disease).

### What Causes Lower Urinary Tract Problems in Cats?

* Stones, crystals or debris accumulation in the bladder or urethra
* Urethral plug (accumulation of debris from urine)
* Bladder inflammation or infection
* Incontinence from excessive water drinking or weak bladder
* Injury to, or tumor in, the urinary tract
* Stress
* Spinal cord problems
* Congenital abnormality

### What Health Conditions Might Lead to Lower Urinary Tract Problems?

Endocrine diseases such as hyperthyroidism and [diabetes](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/feline-diabetes-symptoms-treatments-prevention-diet) mellitus can cause lower urinary tract problems in cats.

### Which Cats Are Prone to Lower Urinary Tract Problems?

FLUTD is rarely diagnosed in animals younger than one year; the average age is typically four years. Male cats are generally more prone to urethral blockages because of their narrower urethras.

### How Can I Tell if My Cat Has Lower Urinary Tract Problems?

The following signs may indicate that your cat is having trouble with his urinary tract:

* Inability to urinate or only passing a small amount of urine
* Bloody or cloudy urine
* Loss of bladder control, dribbling urine
* Increased frequency of urination or visits to the [litter box](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-litter-litter-boxes)
* Straining and/or crying out in pain when trying to pass urine
* Prolonged squatting in litter box
* Fear/avoidance of litter box and soiling in inappropriate places
* Constant licking of urinary opening
* Strong odor of ammonia in urine
* Lethargy
* Vomiting
* Increased water consumption
* Hard, distended abdomen

### What Should I Do If I Think My Cat Has Lower Urinary Tract Problems?

Please see your veterinarian for immediate medical attention, especially if your cat is straining to urinate or crying out in pain. This could be a medical emergency!

### How Are Lower Urinary Tract Problems Diagnosed?

To diagnose a lower urinary tract problem, your vet should conduct a complete physical exam, a urinalysis and possibly urine culture, blood work, radiographs or ultrasound.

### How Are Lower Urinary Tract Problems Treated?

Because feline urinary problems are so varied and potentially serious in nature, your first step is to get immediate veterinary care. Depending on your cat’s prognosis, one of the following may be recommended:

* [Antibiotics](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/antibiotics-for-cats) or other medications
* Dietary changes
* Increase in water intake
* Urinary acidifiers
* Expelling of small stones through urethra
* Surgery to either remove bladder stones or tumor, or to correct congenital abnormality
* Urinary catheter or surgery to remove urethral blockage in male cats
* Fluid therapy

### What Can Happen If a Cat's Lower urinary Tract Problems Go Untreated?

Untreated urinary problems can cause partial or complete obstruction of the urethra, preventing a cat from urinating. This is a medical emergency that can very quickly lead to [kidney failure](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/kidney-failure-uremia-symptoms-cats) and/or rupture of the bladder, and can prove fatal if the obstruction is not relieved right away.

## Shedding in Cats

Shedding is a cat’s natural process of losing dead hair. Outdoor [cats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm) may lose more hair in the spring and fall and retain more fur in the winter, while indoor cats can shed all year round. Regularly [grooming](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-grooming) your cat and vacuuming hair from your house should minimize the inconvenience of shedding. However, if you see bald patches in your cat’s fur or notice a significant loss of hair, the underlying cause may be a health-related problem and should be investigated by a veterinarian.

### What Would Make a Cat Shed Excessively?

A variety of medical, dietary and stress-related issues can cause your cat to lose more hair than is normal. If you notice he’s losing an excessive amount of hair or has bald patches, please consult your veterinarian immediately. Your cat may be suffering from one of the following health issues:

* Allergies
* [Ringworm](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/ringworm-in-cats)
* [Bacterial infection](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/bacterial-diseases-in-cats)
* [Fleas](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/ticks-and-fleas-on-cats)
* Hormonal imbalance such as [hyperthyroidism](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-hyperthyroidism)
* [Poor diet](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/how-to-deal-with-a-cat-thats-a-picky-eater)
* Stress
* Certain medications
* [Pregnancy](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/cat-pregnancy-gestation) or lactation
* Sunburn

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### When Is Shedding a Cause for Concern?

If your cat obsessively licks, bites or scratches, if he’s losing patches of hair or stops to scratch or bite the same few spots persistently, then it’s important you take him in for a veterinary exam. There may be a medical, dietary or stress-related issue that needs immediate attention.

### How Can I Minimize My Cat's Shedding?

If your cat sheds a lot and your veterinarian has determined that there is no underlying medical cause, there are a few things you can do to minimize his [hair loss](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/diseases-hair-loss-cats):

* Feed him a healthy, balanced diet.
* Groom him regularly.
* Examine your cat’s skin and coat during your grooming sessions. Checking for hair loss, redness, [bumps](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/cats-lumps-bumps-skin), cuts, [fleas](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/flea-prevention), ticks or other parasites will be a fast way to determine whether you need to go the vet to solve your pet’s shedding.

### What Happens If Shedding goes Untended?

If your cat’s shedding is normal, the worst you may end up with is a hairy wardrobe and home-your cat, however, may suffer from hairballs if she isn’t groomed regularly. If her shedding is due to an underlying medical cause, including allergies, parasites, infections or disease, her health may continue to worsen if you don’t seek veterinary care. Additionally, cats who are not groomed appropriately can become matted-this is especially true for long-haired cats. Matted hair can be painful and lead to underlying [skin problems](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/ss/slideshow-skin-problems-in-cats).

## What Causes Cats to Vomit

You have probably seen your [cat](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm) vomit from time to time without much concern. Vomiting can be a result of something minor, like a cat consuming his meal too quickly, or it can be a sign of a much more serious condition that requires immediate medical attention. Usually, a cat vomits because he ate something disagreeable, ate too much or played too soon after dinner. Vomiting can also be associated with gastrointestinal or systemic disorders.

Some causes for a sudden episode of vomiting, or acute vomiting, include:

* Bacterial infection of the gastrointestinal tract
* Diet-related causes (diet change, food intolerance)
* Gastric or intestinal foreign bodies (toys, hairballs)
* Intestinal parasite
* Acute [kidney failure](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/kidney-failure-uremia-symptoms-cats)
* Acute liver failure or gall bladder inflammation
* Pancreatitis
* Post-operative nausea
* Toxins or chemicals
* Viral infections
* Certain medications

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### What Should I Do If My Cat Vomits Frequently?

An occasional, isolated bout of vomiting is normal. However, frequent vomiting can be a sign of a more serious condition. Please bring your cat to the vet for a complete examination and diagnosis.

Some causes of chronic (ongoing) vomiting include:

* Colitis
* Gastritis
* Pancreatitis
* Diaphragmatic hernia
* Diet related (food allergy or intolerance)
* Foreign bodies
* Gastrointestinal ulceration
* Heartworm infection
* Intestinal obstruction
* Kidney failure
* Liver failure
* Neurological disorders
* Parasites
* Severe [constipation](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/the-scoop-on-cat-poop)
* Toxicity (such as lead)
* Gastric or intestinal tumors

### What Other Symptoms Should I Watch For?

The causes of vomiting are so varied that it can be difficult to diagnose, and so it’s important to consider the circumstances.

What to Watch For:

* Frequency of vomiting. If your cat vomits once and proceeds to eat regularly and have a normal bowel movement, the vomiting was most likely an isolated incident.
* Diarrhea
* [Dehydration](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/dehydration-cats)
* Lethargy
* Blood in vomit
* [Weight loss](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/weight-loss-in-cats)
* Change in appetite and water intake

### When Is It Time to See the Vet?

Please see your vet if you notice any of the symptoms mentioned above or if vomiting persists. Depending on your pet’s age, medical history, physical examination findings and your cat’s particular symptoms, your vet may choose to perform various tests (blood test, X-ray, sonogram, fecal examination) in order to make a diagnosis.

### What Are Some Treatment Options?

The most common course of action is to withhold food and water until after vomiting has stopped for two hours. Afterward, water is introduced slowly, followed by a bland diet. You can baby your cat as you would a sick child and give homemade food such as boiled potatoes, rice or cooked, skinless chicken.

In certain situations your cat may require fluid therapy or antiemetics-drugs to help control vomiting. You’ll need to see your vet to determine the proper remedy.

## Upper Respiratory Infection in Cats

A [cat](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm)’s upper respiratory tract-the nose, throat and sinus area-is susceptible to infections caused by a variety of viruses and bacteria.

### What Causes Upper Respiratory Infections in Cats?

By far, viruses are the most common causes of upper respiratory infections (URIs) in cats. Feline calicivirus and feline herpesvirus account for 80 to 90 percent of all contagious upper respiratory problems, and are prevalent in shelters, catteries and multi-cat households. These viruses can be transmitted from cat to cat through [sneezing](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/why-cats-sneeze), [coughing](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/coughing-cats-causes-feline-coughing), or while [grooming](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-grooming) or sharing food and water bowls. Once infected, cats can become carriers for life, and though they may not show clinical signs, they can still transmit the viruses to others. Cats often develop bacterial infections secondary to these common viral infections.

There are also upper respiratory infections in cats that are primarily caused by bacteria. Chlamydia and Bordetella-also commonly found in shelters and areas with multiple cats-are two such bacterial infections. Less common in cats than dogs, Bordetella is usually associated with stress and overcrowded living conditions.

### What Are the General Symptoms of Upper respiratory Infections?

Symptoms differ depending on the cause and location of the infection, but some common clinical signs of upper respiratory problems in cats include:

* Sneezing
* Congestion
* Runny nose
* Cough
* Clear to colored nasal discharge
* Gagging, [drooling](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/drooling-in-cats)
* [Fever](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/fevers-in-cats)
* Loss of or decreased appetite
* Nasal and oral ulcers
* Squinting or rubbing eyes
* Depression

### Are Certain Cats Prone to Upper Respiratory Infections?

Age, vaccination status and physical condition all play a role in a cat’s susceptibility to upper respiratory infections, but cats who live in multi-cat households or shelters are most susceptible. Veterinarians have found that stress plays a role in causing outbreaks of URI, and cats in any shelter, cattery or boarding facility are generally experiencing high levels of stress. Cats who have recovered from URI can become carriers, and may experience recurrences when stressed.

Certain breeds like Persians and other flat-faced breeds have a predisposition to develop upper respiratory infections due to their facial structure.

### What Should I Do If I Think My Cat Has an Upper Respiratory Infection?

It’s important to bring your cat to a veterinarian if you think she may be suffering from an upper respiratory infection. A brief exam by a veterinarian will help to determine if your cat requires medication, has a fever or is dehydrated. Avoid self-diagnosis, since your cat may be infectious and require isolation, [antibiotics](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/antibiotics-for-cats) or additional veterinary care.

### How Are Upper Respiratory Infections Treated in Cats?

Your veterinarian will prescribe the best course of treatment for your cat, which may include medications, isolation, rest and support with fluids and nutritional support.

### What Happens If an Upper Respiratory Infection Is Left Untreated?

Left untreated, some upper respiratory infections can progress to [pneumonia](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/pneumonia-cats) or have other serious complications, such as blindness or chronic breathing difficulties.

### How Can I Prevent My Cat from Getting Upper Respiratory Infections?

* Keep your cat indoors to minimize the risk of exposure to infected animals.
* Properly isolate infected cats to protect other pets living in the same environment.
* Minimize stress.
* Keep your cat up to date on vaccines as recommended by your vet. Vaccines for upper respiratory disease in cats may not actually prevent infection, but they help lessen the severity of the disease in some cases.
* Regular veterinary exams and preventive care can help catch and treat problems early. A cat’s best defense against upper respiratory infection is a healthy immune system.
* Practice good hygiene and wash your hands thoroughly when handling multiple cats.