

Acute diarrhoea procedure

This information is intended to give guidance for vets and CP staff and volunteers in the treatment of a CP cat with sudden onset (acute) diarrhoea.

In the shelter environment acute diarrhoea is often caused by stress, but dietary indiscretion, a change in diet and overfeeding are also common causes.

Consideration should also be given to infectious causes of diarrhoea such as round- or tapeworms, protozoa such as *Coccidia* and *Giardia*, viral causes such as feline parvovirus and bacterial causes such as *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. Infectious diarrhoea may be the result of an existing infectious disease or a reactivated infectious disease due to stress-induced immunosuppression.

Some of the infectious causes of diarrhoea are **zoonotic**, so particular attention to hygiene should be made with the implication of barrier nursing and appropriate infectious waste disposal where necessary.

Other causes of diarrhoea, some of which may lead to more chronic disease include, but are not limited to, food allergies, inflammatory bowel disease, neoplasia, disorders of the pancreas, kidney disease, liver disease, hyperthyroidism, drug reactions and FIV/FelV.

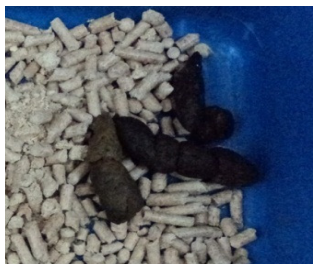
CP staff and volunteer guidelines

If the cat has an incident of diarrhoea (faeces are grade 3 or below as defined on the CP faecal grading chart), monitor the cat closely and start an observation sheet. Carrying out the following checklist will help your vet with their diagnosis and treatment plan:

- Daily bodyweight check
- Behaviour/demeanour
- Appetite
- Thirst
- Skin tent
- Gum colour
- Nature of diarrhoea
 - Colour
 - Volume
 - Frequency of passing faeces
 - Blood or mucus present?
 - Straining present
 - Consistency of faeces (grades 1-6)*
- In tray or out of tray
- Is the cat on any medication?
- Is the cat wormed up to date?
- Is the cat on a special diet?
- Check the cat's age

*See CP faecal grading chart

CP faecal grading chart - Grades 1-6

Grade 1		Diarrhoea – “Gravy” – Very runny
Grade 2		Diarrhoea – “Lumpy gravy” – Mostly unformed stools
Grade 3		Diarrhoea – “Meat with a bit of gravy” – Some formed stools in softer stools (approx ½ & ½)
Grade 4		Normal – Mostly formed stools with a very small amount of softer stools
Grade 5		Normal – All hard, well-formed stools
Grade 6		Constipated – Small, very hard “pellets”

Institute the 'Diarrhoea management for weaned cats and kittens guidelines' (found below) unless one of the following applies, in which case ensure the cat is seen by your vet:

- The cat is showing other signs of illness eg vomiting, coughing, sneezing
- The cat is depressed
- The cat is very underweight
- The cat has no appetite
- The cat has pale gums
- The cat has increased skin tent
- The cat is on medication for another condition or has another condition
- The cat is on a special diet for reasons other than a sensitive stomach or obesity
- The cat has more than one episode of diarrhoea with blood, or one episode with lots of blood
- The cat is under 8 weeks old

Diarrhoea management for weaned cats and kittens

1. **Give worming treatment if due.** If you are unsure check with your vet before repeat worming
2. **Start anti-diarrhoeal treatment.** Discuss with your vet which product would be most suitable to keep in stock and their preferred length of treatment – note on observation sheet
3. **Offer water only** – note on observation sheet
4. **Starve of all food for one mealtime** – note on observation sheet

After starving feed bland, commercial, sensitivity-type diet at the appropriate amounts as outlined in the feeding plan below. The amount fed may differ for each brand and type of food. Give no other treats or food unless specified apart from water – note on the observation sheet

One of the following commercial diets should be chosen:

- Purina Proplan EN cans
- Hills i/d cans or pouches
- Royal Canin Sensitivity Control pouches

Recommended feeding plan:

For the 1st 24 hours after starving

Feed ½ maintenance amount of bland food, divided into 4 meals

For the 2nd 24 hours after starving and until diarrhoea resolves

Feed maintenance amount of bland food, divided into 4 meals

For 2 further days after diarrhoea resolves

Feed maintenance amount of bland food, divided into 2 meals for adults or normal number of meals for kittens

Wean back gradually on to normal food over a week

Day 1 & 2: Feed ¾ bland, ¼ normal	} Divided into 2 meals for adults or normal number of meals for kittens
Day 3 & 4: Feed ½ bland, ½ normal	
Day 5 & 6: Feed ¼ bland, ¾ normal	
Day 7 onwards: Feed normal food and normal number of meals	

If no improvement is seen after 3 days, or if the cat develops any of the problems above before this, please ensure the cat is seen by your vet. Following examination, the vet may request a fresh faecal sample (collected over 3 consecutive days where appropriate).

Vet guidelines

Where a cat continues to experience diarrhoea and CP staff or volunteers have followed the 'Diarrhoea management for weaned cats and kittens' guidelines above, but have seen no improvement after 3 days or the cat has developed other signs of illness, the cat should be presented to the vet.

After examination of the affected cat, the following treatment is recommended:

- Oral fenbendazole (see CP Commonly Ordered Products List) 50mg/kg once daily for 3-5 days to cover *Giardia spp*
- Continue with anti-diarrhoeal treatments such as probiotics and adsorbents (see CP Commonly Ordered Products List) where appropriate
- Continue with bland commercial sensitivity-type diet until the diarrhoea has resolved

If an infectious cause is suspected, barrier nursing should be implemented if this has not already been done. Staff and/or volunteers should be made aware of the risks of zoonotic disease and the care taken when handling the affected cat, food bowls and litter trays.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to suggest a blanket protocol for the treatment of diarrhoea without knowing what the underlying cause of the diarrhoea is. It is also important to consider whether you are dealing with small intestinal or large intestinal diarrhoea.

Should the diarrhoea persist following the initial treatment suggested above or where the vet is suspicious of an infectious cause, it is recommended that a faecal sample is collected (over 3 consecutive days where appropriate) for analysis, culture and sensitivity. This may include analysis for worms and protozoa and where available may be carried out in-house. Where this is not available and for further testing, samples should be sent to the external laboratory currently used on the CP laboratory discount scheme. The appropriate treatment can then be prescribed if this analysis and/or culture provide useful information on the cause of the diarrhoea. Where *Tritrichomonas foetus* is suspected, it is also recommended that a rectal smear is looked at in-house or faeces are sent for PCR testing. Care should be taken not to carry out PCR testing for other diarrhoea-causing viral agents, as the results yielded may be difficult to interpret in the shelter environment.

Around 90% of acute diarrhoea is self-limiting and it is therefore appropriate to treat these cases symptomatically, reserving diagnostic work-ups for cats that relapse, are systemically unwell or are suffering from chronic diarrhoea.

If a cat is systemically unwell and/or pyrexia or the diarrhoea becomes protracted and chronic, further diagnostic testing may be required to determine the cause, but CP would encourage targeted rather than comprehensive testing.

For cats that present with severe diarrhoea, dehydration, pyrexia, blood in faeces and abdominal pain, hospitalisation and fluid therapy may be indicated alongside treatments discussed previously. Antibiotics should be reserved for these cases and only indicated where there is a known bacterial or protozoal pathogen, there is breached gut mucosa ie blood seen in faeces and/or the cat is displaying systemic signs such as pyrexia.

Should you require further guidance on acute, chronic or non-responsive diarrhoea or the treatments recommended in these guidelines, please contact the Veterinary Department.

Further information

Cats Protection has produced a handout for owners who have adopted a cat previously diagnosed with infectious diarrhoea while in our care. This is available on CatNav for Cats Protection staff and volunteers to download.

Cats Protection produces a leaflet which provides information on Digestive Disorders – Vomiting and Diarrhoea which can be accessed on our website at www.cats.org.uk.

Cats Protection is part of The Cat Group, a collection of professional organisations dedicated to feline welfare through the development and promotion of policies and recommendations on the care and keeping of all cats. The Cat Group have produced a policy statement on Zoonoses which is available here: www.thecatgroup.org.uk.

Further information is also available from International Cat Care. See www.icatcare.org.