

Cats and Hairballs



Cats spend a significant part of their lives cleaning and grooming -- as much as 1/3 of their waking hours. While this natural instinct makes them ideal house pets, it can lead to some uncomfortable side effects.

The problem begins during the cleaning process, when cats often swallow their own hair. The cat's tongue is the culprit. It has tiny, barb-like projections on its surface which pull loose hair from the coat. Because of the inward angle of these barbs, the hair remains lodged on the tongue's surface until the cat swallows it. Since hair is largely insoluble protein, it cannot be dissolved by the cat's digestive system. As this undigested hair begins to knot in the stomach and accumulate in the gastrointestinal tract it can interfere with normal digestion and elimination.

Symptoms of "hairballs" include constipation, listlessness, dry cough, and even vomiting. It is also the most frequent cause of depression and loss of appetite in cats.

The most dramatic and obvious symptom is the regurgitated hairball, which is often tubular in shape. Besides being an inconvenience to clean up, it is a definite sign that your cat has a problem and needs help.

Although rarely fatal, hairballs are very uncomfortable for your cat and can lead to serious complications.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Daily brushing of the cat's coat to remove loose hair is good preventative medicine. Long-haired breeds like Himalayans and Persians need special attention. During the spring when all cats shed, daily brushing is especially important. After brushing, wipe your cat down with a damp towel to remove loose hair.

Besides brushing the coat, there are several medications which are available to eliminate hairballs and help prevent their reoccurrence. A dietary fiber supplement, when added to the cat's food, can aid in the elimination of accumulated hair and other materials without discomfort. Look for foods that say "Hairball Control" or "Hairball Formula" on the label. Laxatives have been recommended by veterinarians for decades. There are many different brands of laxative remedies available and it should be easy to find one that appeals to your cat's taste.

Remember, your cat relies on you for help in relieving this problem. A program of frequent brushing, regular use of a hairball remedy and following the advice of your veterinarian is all it takes.

Caring People Helping Pets

2082 Cheyenne Court, Grafton, WI 53024 • phone: 262-375-0130 • fax: 262-375-4196 • www.bestfriendsvet.com

