

FELINE CONSTIPATION

Older cats sometimes develop constipation, resulting in less frequent bowel movements. This leads to dry, hard stools which cause pain and difficult straining when the cat attempts to have a bowel movement.

There are many causes of feline constipation. Some common causes include foreign bodies (string, hair, bones), tumors, pelvic fractures, spinal cord damage, and intestinal scars from other injuries.

MEGACOLON is a condition in cats where the colon becomes very dilated and is unable to contract sufficiently to evacuate the stools from the body. The major cause of this condition is thought to be some type of damage to the nerve supply controlling the muscles of the colon.

Retention of fecal material can have a very detrimental effect on the cat. Digested food that stays in the intestine too long will begin to “spoil” and “rot.” When this occurs, the bacterial and toxins produced by the rotting food may then be absorbed into the bloodstream making the cat very sick, sometimes resulting in death.

DIAGNOSIS is usually confirmed very easily after obtaining a detailed history and performing a physical examination. Sometimes radiographs (x-rays) are necessary to determine the extent of the problem or to locate the presence of strictures or a foreign body. Blood tests are sometimes necessary in order to evaluate other body systems that may have been damaged.

PROGNOSIS. Many cats will have recurrent problems with constipation and require long-term medications to ensure proper nerve stimulation and muscle contraction of the intestine.

TREATMENT is directed at the specific cause of the constipation. Treatment may include manual removal of the bowel movements, cleansing enemas, laxatives, nerve stimulants, antibiotics, and sometimes even surgery when the condition cannot be controlled with medications.