



HOW TO HELP CATS WITH HAIRBALLS

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THE ISSUE

Cats' digestive systems are designed to get rid of indigestible material (hair, bones, toxic plants, etc.) by vomiting. So occasional vomiting is normal behavior for a cat—and can save a cat's life if it has swallowed something toxic. But cat vomit is acidic, and this acid can cause significant damage to the enamel of cats' teeth over time. And most cat owners prefer not to clean up after their cat more frequently than is necessary. So, both the health of cats and the happiness of those who care for them can be increased by reducing the frequency of vomiting. Most of the indigestible material swallowed by domestic cats is hair (their own or another cat's). We can't (and wouldn't want to) completely prevent cats from swallowing hair, but we can reduce the amount of hair cats swallow, and we can improve cats' ability to pass hair through their digestive system without the need for vomiting.

WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

If at any time you feel that your cat is not improving, the condition is getting worse, or other symptoms develop, please see your veterinarian immediately. Hairballs can get lodged in a cat's intestinal tract and block the intestines or stomach and may need to be removed by a veterinarian. Indications of this condition include vomiting food and water, abdominal pain, lethargy and diarrhea. If your cat develops these symptoms, call your veterinarian.

THE SOLUTION

Some cats will be helped with just one or two of the approaches listed below. Other cats may require more changes. We've starred (*) the approaches we recommend trying first.

1 Reduce hair loss through dietary changes

- ***Switch to a raw frozen food.** Raw foods frequently lead to improvements in skin and coat health, resulting in less shedding. The natural enzymes in raw food help to break down hair (protein). Raw frozen foods also move hair through a cat's system more effectively than kibble because of their much higher moisture content. To find out if a raw diet would be a good fit for you and your cat ask a Muddy to help you with our decision tool *Can Your Cat Benefit From Raw Foods?*
 - ***Supplement with wet food.** Wet foods also move hair through cats' systems more effectively than kibble because of their much higher moisture content. Ingredients to look for in wet foods for cats with hairballs: avocado oils, sweet potatoes, cellulose, pumpkin, pea fiber, chicory root, sunflower oils, butternut squash, apples, and fish oils.

Don't let the fact that your cat has rejected wet food discourage you from trying—Muddies can almost always find a wet diet that will work. Additionally, you can add in more fiber directly to their food with products that contain pumpkin or other fiber-rich vegetables.

- ***Increase the health of your cat's skin and coat with a skin and coat supplement.** Without the right or enough protein, vitamins and minerals, cat's hair becomes brittle and more likely to break during grooming.
- **Switch to a high fiber kibble.** Look for rice hulls, pea fiber, beet pulp, psyllium, cellulose, FOS, pectin or rice bran in the ingredient panel. To avoid digestive upset, make the diet change gradually over the course of a week.
- **Increase your cat's oil consumption** with an essential fatty acid (EFA) supplement.

2. Reduce hair consumption by grooming

- ***Brush your cat (once a day if possible).** Brushes to consider include rubber curry brush, Kitty Tongue or a wire pin brush. For long haired cats, a Furminator can be very effective, but don't use it more than once or twice a month (or your long-haired cat may begin to look like a hairless cat).
- **Bathe your cat once a month** with either a traditional water and shampoo bath or with an alternative dry bath option (foams or wipes).

Mud Bay and its staff strive to help dog and cat owners improve the health of their animals and to increase the happiness owners experience in caring for their animals by providing natural foods, well-made supplies and useful information. Mud Bay and its staff do not diagnose or treat specific conditions, and the information provided by Mud Bay's staff, publications, website and other media are not substitutes for treatment by a veterinarian. A great vet is an invaluable resource, and we recommend that owners discuss diet and other changes in the care of their animals with theirs.

3. Help hair move through your cat's system; Help your cat eliminate hair

- **Offer safe grass and plant sources.** Cats often eat grass or plants in order to help them vomit indigestible material out of their stomachs. Plants also act as a natural laxative, helping indigestible material pass through the intestines. (They're also a source of folic acid.) Cat grass or cat herb gardens can help stop your cat from eating inappropriate, toxic, or pesticide-laden plants in the house or outside.
- **Improve the health of your cat's digestive system with a digestive supplement.**
- **Lubricate hairballs** to help facilitate movement through the intestinal tract with an herbal remedy such as marshmallow root or slippery elm.

RESULTS

Results will vary depending on the cat and on approach or approaches used. In general, you can expect dietary changes, grooming or lubricants to produce improvement in one to two weeks. Dietary supplements take longer: four to twelve weeks.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The scientific name for the thing most of us call a *hairball* (an accumulation of hair in a cat's intestinal tract) is *Trichobezoar*.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

Mud Bay staffers are specifically trained to help cat owners with the challenges of hairballs. Muddies can also help you find the products that match the recommendations on this sheet, so if you need more help or information, please let us know.

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