

**Gastrointestinal Disorders**

FELINE CONSTIPATION AND MEGACOLON



Constipation is a relatively common problem in cats. While many cats have one or two episodes without further problems, chronic and/or severe constipation can progress to obstipation and megacolon.

Dehydration is the most common cause of constipation in cats, although other conditions (e.g., obstruction of the colon, electrolyte imbalances and neuromuscular disease) can cause or contribute to constipation. Whenever possible, it is important to identify and correct or manage the underlying cause of constipation because it will influence the specific treatment plan.

Nutrition plays an important role in the management of feline constipation, obstipation and megacolon. The dietary factors of greatest concern are water, dietary fiber and diet digestibility.

Key Messages

- Increased dietary fiber and moisture are the key nutrients to modify when managing mild to moderate cases of constipation in cats.
- Many constipated cats experience dehydration, which results in increased water absorption from the colon and leaves dry, hard feces. Options for increasing water intake to help maintain appropriate hydration and soften stool include:
 - Feeding wet food (e.g., cans/tins, pouches/sachets)
 - Adding water to dry kibble
 - Increasing the number and type of water stations in the home
 - Offering a nutrient-enriched, flavored water supplement

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Key Messages (continued)

- Increased dietary fiber – ideally, a combination of soluble and insoluble fiber – may benefit cats with constipation. Soluble fiber increases stool moisture content, while insoluble fiber increases fecal bulk, resulting in improved peristalsis and reflex contraction of the colon. Good hydration is critically important when dietary fiber is increased.
- Cats with megacolon should be fed a highly digestible diet to reduce the amount of feces.
- A change in food, if needed, should be performed gradually to help encourage acceptance.

Additional Resources

Benjamin, S. E., & Dobratz, K. J. (2020). Retrospective evaluation of risk factors and treatment outcome predictors in cats presenting to the emergency room for constipation. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, 22(2), 153–160. doi:10.1177/1098612X19832663

Chandler, M. (2013). Focus on nutrition: Dietary management of gastrointestinal disease. *Compendium: Continuing Education for the Veterinarian*, 35(6), E1–3.

Davenport, D. J., Remillard, R. L., & Carroll, M. (2010). Constipation/obstipation/megacolon. In M. S. Hand, C. D. Thatcher, R. L. Remillard, P. Roudebush, & B. J. Novotny (Eds.), *Small animal clinical nutrition* (5th ed., pp. 1117–1126). Mark Morris Institute.

Linder, D. E. (2017). Featuring fiber: Understanding types of fiber and clinical uses. *Today's Veterinary Practice*, 7(1), 69–74. <https://todaysveterinarypractice.com/acvn-nutrition-notesfeaturing-fiber-understanding-types-fiber-clinical-uses>

The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.