



## GET THE SCOOP - HAIR BALLS - PART 1 - MY STORY

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I had a cat (still have her in fact, but she's a different cat now) that routinely vomited from the time she was about 1y old. Her entire family was 'defective' in some way or another—a brother and sister with heart disease, another brother with a neurological disease, and a sister with renal issues. They were all lovely cats (run of mill Domestic Short Hairs from the local streets of Melvindale), but they didn't come with the best of health. Anyway, I suppose that means I didn't expect glowing health out of her from the outset. Don't get me wrong, I took her to the vet for her yearly exams from the time she was a baby, but the vets, they too, just shrugged their shoulders and said, 'She's just a vomiter. Most likely hairballs. Shouldn't be a problem.' And I'd get her her yearly physical and vaccines, and we'd go on our merry way.

What I found out later was that routine vomiting ISN'T normal, and, incidentally, neither is having regular hairballs. An occasional hairball (after a hard night of grooming? j/k!) isn't unheard of, and shouldn't make one worry over their cats health—BUT, routine daily or weekly vomiting, for any reason, should make you sit up and take notice.

To quote Fern Crist, DVM "There is no such thing as 'just a hairball'!" She notes that cats were created with hair, and with the ability to clean that hair with their tongues which means hair will be ingested on a regular basis. Their whole system has evolved to deal with this. What it tells you if your cat is vomiting up hairballs semi-regularly is that the system is broken—and it most likely won't be fixed by a petroleum product (cat lax, Vaseline, laxatone, etc.) or regular brushing.

Often the system is broken b/c of intestinal issues stemming from diet: cats aren't meant to eat carbs and fillers. They are meant to eat raw and fluid filled meats with veggie or seed filled innards (mice and birds, sorry animal lovers, but its true)—we see problems with lack of fluid in a diet in cats who have urinary blockages and crystal formation in their urine, but it's also apparent in animals whose GI tracts can't process things well. Their motility is decreased, and often irritation leads to swelling, which may lead to Irritable Bowel Disease, which if left alone for years can develop into Lymphoma. So, number one, if your cat is vomiting hairballs (or just vomiting), look at how you feed him/her. Wet foods, high quality (human grade if possible) foods, and 'real', 'fresh' or raw foods are the way to go. Allergies to certain ingredients are also a very real possibility—so try your best to ferret out food with the highest quality ingredients you can manage, and swap ingredients around til you find something that doesn't make your cat hork said food and/or hairballs back up at you. You can also offer wheat grass, as fresh veggies/foods are very much lacking in indoor pet diets as well. Let's face it, cooking for yourself and your family is probably hard enough, let alone cooking for the cat. We all tend to take the easy route in feeding--however, not all our cats are good with that. Be aware, if yours isn't, something needs to change!

One of my number one rules always has been that great diet is the absolute best thing you can do for your cat's long and healthy life—along with clean fresh water and air quality. So imagine my surprise when I found that my cats diet wasn't helping her, even though it was what I considered a 'good diet'!?

In fact, it took a short foray by my cat at the age of 13y into renal failure, with vomiting, weight loss, horrible breath, and hiding to make me sit up and take notice that my cat wasn't 'just a vomiter'. Her food was killing her, and if things didn't change, it would take her all the way out. Luckily, I was able to afford an ultrasound of her belly, got the diagnosis of renal disease, but b/c of my past job history (US tech), I was also able to see on her images some really thickened and enflamed bowel. I knew there was something going on with those intestines, and it just so turned out that the renal food we switched her to (Royal Canin Renal LP) also helped her intestines heal up. What I saw from the outside: a cat whose personality began to shine, she stopped hiding, she got glossier, she started to groom herself, the vomiting stopped, and her breath improved as well as her gums and teeth. Amazingly enough, along with a renal med to bind phosphate, her renal values returned to normal and her bouts with urinary infections and stones decreased measurably!



It sure gave me an education in what it means to see hairballs regularly. Now, your cats may not all be in renal failure, but know that hairballs should be infrequent. If they aren't, then you need to get your cat to the vet, and if the vet thinks regular hairballs are normal, you need to find a different vet.

As an aside, Part II will give us more reasons why cats vomit, how any of it ties in with hairballs, and what to do to help your cat get back to good. But for now, if you'd like more information, you can visit <http://consciouscat.net/2013/04/26/national-hairball-awareness-day-2013/> for some good links to start you off.

Also, <http://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/archive/2010/11/09/vomitting-pet-cat-health.aspx> for a great video on the myriad of reasons cats vomit.