

# **Downers Grove Animal Hospital & Bird Clinic, P.C.**

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## **Adult Cat Hairballs**

Hairballs are a common problem seen in cats. Accumulation of hair in the stomach of the cat is a direct result of the significant portion of the cat's life that is spent grooming itself. It has been estimated that cats groom themselves for up to 1/3 of their waking hours.

The problem begins as the cat swallows the hair he has licked off during the cleaning process. The barb-like projections on his tongue pull the hair loose from the skin and hair coat. These barbs point inward on the tongue, which causes the hair to remain lodged on his tongue until it is swallowed.

Hair is mostly undigestible and therefore begins to knot up in the stomach. As the hairball enlarges, it is unable to pass out of the stomach down into the small intestine. It then becomes an irritant to the stomach lining eventually being vomited up in most cases.

Signs of "hairballs" include vomiting, constipation, listlessness, and coughing. Hairballs frequently cause a loss of appetite and even depression. The regurgitated "hairball" is often not actually round in shape, but rather "tubular".

Finding regurgitated hairballs is a definite sign that the cat has a problem and needs help. Although rarely fatal, hairballs are an inconvenience to cleanup, very uncomfortable for the cat, and can lead to serious complications.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING HAIRBALLS:**

Daily brushing of your pet to remove loose hair is the best prevention. Longhaired breeds especially need special attention. After brushing, wipe your cat's hair coat with a damp towel to remove loose hair.

Medications are available to eliminate hairballs and help prevent reoccurrence. Laxatives in the form of pastes have been recommended for many years. There are many different brands available that will be readily accepted by your cat. If your cat does not accept it, the gel can be rubbed on his mouth, nose, or even on the feet. It will then be swallowed during his normal grooming process. If this does not help a bulk forming laxative (Vetasy1®) sometimes works well.