



Feline Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)



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Feline Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is not a single disease. Instead, it's a condition made up of a number of gastrointestinal disorders in which a cat's gastrointestinal (GI) tract becomes chronically irritated and inflamed. Basically, and in lay terms, if your kitty has IBD, it means they have all kinds of long-lasting tummy trouble.

Inflammatory cells infiltrate the walls of the GI tract, thickening them and disrupting the ability of the GI tract to properly digest and absorb food. There is no age, gender, or breed predisposition for feline IBD. However, the disease occurs most often in middle-aged and older cats. It is worthwhile to note that Inflammatory Bowel Disease is often *mistakenly* called Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

The exact cause of feline IBD is unknown, more than one cause of IBD in cats is usually suspected. These include:

- Hypersensitivity to bacteria
- Food allergies (meat proteins, food additives, artificial coloring, preservatives, milk protein, gluten, etc.)
- Genetic factors
- Immunology factors

While the cause of IBD is unknown, current evidence suggest that it arises from a complex abnormal interaction between the immune system, diet, bacterial populations in the intestines, and other environmental factors. **Feline IBD is a diagnosis of exclusion.** In other words, there are many disorders that can cause gastrointestinal inflammation, and these should be rule out before honing in on a diagnosis of IBD. *Examples of other disorders to consider include:*

- Intestinal parasites
- Viral infections such as feline leukemia (FeLV) or feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)
- Food intolerance
- Food allergies
- Gastrointestinal cancer
- Metabolic disorders such as hyperthyroidism



Feline IBD results in the inflammation of the stomach (gastritis), small intestines (enteritis), and/or large intestines (colitis). Symptoms of IBD in cats usually are chronic and occur with increased frequency over time (daily, weekly or monthly). *Some of the most common symptoms of IBD in cats are:*

- Weight loss
- Diarrhea
- Lethargy
- Chronic intermittent vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Abdominal sounds (rumbling and gurgling)
- Flatulence (gas)
- Bright red blood in the stool
- Distressed coat hair
- Changes in appetite (eating much more or much less)

Diagnosing IBD in cats

To diagnose IBD in your cat, your veterinarian will likely perform a variety of diagnostic tests, and will take a detailed history and ask you questions about the duration and frequency of symptoms.

A complete physical examination will be conducted, followed by routine laboratory tests, including:

- Complete blood count (CBC)
- Biochemistry profile
- Urinalysis
- Fecal analysis

Although these tests do not definitively diagnose IBD in cats, they are non-invasive and help rule out other diseases (such as kidney disease, elevated thyroid levels, and liver disease) where the symptoms can be identical to IBD.

A veterinarian will normally examine the intestines for a definitive diagnosis of IBD if all other illnesses that present the same symptoms as IBD are ruled out with testing. Further examinations may include: X-rays, ultrasounds, an endoscopy, or biopsy of intestinal tissue samples. It is important to note that intestinal lymphoma, a form of cancer, can be particularly difficult to distinguish from feline IBD.

Treatment and Prognosis for IBD in Cats

In most cats, IBD cannot be “cured” but can be successfully managed. However, even after complete recovery, relapses are common. Treatment of feline IBD can be challenging. The goal of treatment is to identify and remove the cause of inflammation if possible, and to suppress the immune response. This is usually accomplished through the use of special diets and immunosuppressive drugs.

Major goals of treatments are:

- Stabilizing your cat’s weight
- Relieving GI symptoms
- Reducing the immune system’s response

Diet trials, immunosuppressive drugs, and antibiotics are key components of the therapy for IBD in cats. No one diet is suitable for cats with IBD. Some cats respond to a particular diet while others may show a lesser response, or no response at all. Highly digestible diets may be beneficial.

Your veterinarian may also recommend a food trial using hypoallergenic diets. Rabbit, duck, or venison-based diets are common initial choices.

In some cases, a change in diet is not enough to treat your cat's IBD, and medications are needed. Corticosteroids are the most commonly prescribed immunosuppressive drugs for the treatment of IBD. Typically, oral prednisone is given for at least 2 to 4 weeks (starting with a higher dose that is gradually reduced). Metronidazole which has antibiotic, anti-inflammatory, and antiprotozoal properties, and it is usually fairly well tolerated may be recommended along with dietary modifications as the first medical treatment. Your veterinarian may also prescribe antibiotics if your cat has diarrhea.

Although IBD isn't curable, the short-term prognosis in most cats with IBD is excellent. However, even with proper management, symptoms may come and go. You will need to be patient with the forms of treatment suggested by your veterinarian, and strictly adhere to their diet recommendations.

It is very important to keep in mind that the sooner the diagnosis is made and treatment is started, the better chances your cat has to recover. In more severe cases, cats can have a difficult time responding to treatments or could not respond at all, and the prognosis is poorer for these cats. Vigilant monitoring by the veterinarian and the pet parent is also critical, and in most cases of IBD in cats, living a long and happy life is likely.

EndFIP® has a vision: every cat a healthy cat. This vision expands beyond the boundaries of FIP. The focus of our group is to educate, inform and inspire people to create lasting solution to prevent cats from becoming infected with feline coronavirus, thus preventing FIP altogether. We also like to provide information about other issues affecting cats worldwide.

All of us at EndFIP® are dedicated to keeping cats healthy and happy.

